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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF RACIAL DIVERSITY ON CHURCH GROWTH: A CASE STUDY OF BUFFALO SUBURBAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN LANCASTER, NEW YORK

by

Luis A. Mancebo

Chair: Erich W. Baumgartner

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF RACIAL DIVERSITY ON CHURCH GROWTH: A CASE STUDY OF BUFFALO SUBURBAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN LANCASER, NEW YORK

Name of researcher: Luis A. Mancebo

Name and degree of faculty chair: Erich W. Baumgartner, PhD

Date completed: December 2020

There is a growing phenomenon in the United States of America: multiracial churches. While earlier research indicates that church growth typically happens in more homogenous congregations, more and more churches are growing that are multiracial. This case study focused on the growth of Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC), a multiracial church in Lancaster, New York. Data collection was done through focus groups of church leaders and members, and a review of any available church and membership records.

BSSDAC started as a White congregation in Buffalo in 1885 and moved to the suburbs in the 1980s where the initial transition toward diversity began. After 2000, as

Buffalo neighborhoods assimilated refugees, church leaders intentionally opened its doors for the membership to become racially diverse. The church grew from 300 members in 2007 to 575 in 2019 (an average annual growth rate of 7.64% comprised of 222 White, 154 Black/African American, 128 Asian, 9 Two or More Races, 32 Other, and 30 Hispanic).

This study identified several elements that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation from the perspective of church leaders and members: First, BSSDAC became a multiracial church in response to shifting demographics paired with intentional multifaceted adaptation that created the potential for growth. Second, pastors intentionally created an inclusive multiracial environment by recruiting members from different backgrounds into the lay leadership and ministry teams. This diversity in lay leadership influenced the ability of BSSDAC to embrace racial diversity. Third, the worship experience incorporated diversity in language and music, contributing to a climate that fostered participation by racially diverse individuals. Fourth, BSSDAC invested resources in meeting physical needs of racially diverse people and facilitating their attendance at BSSDAC by providing transportation. Fifth, the intentionally welcoming environment drew members from different backgrounds into church activities and ministries, which contributed to a climate favoring the building of relationships among racially diverse individuals. Sixth, a visible and accessible location made it easier for people residing in communities with greater diversity in nearby Buffalo City to reach BSSDAC. Seventh, a deliberate acceptance of diversity and a willingness to adapt to differences along with an intentional position of non-tolerance for racial discrimination created an accepting environment where openness to change and adapting to differences

contributed to the growth. Eighth, the success of BSSDAC while remarkable cannot be taken for granted in the continuing and often complex challenges of inequality and prejudice in our communities. It is only as BSSDAC continues to learn to be an intentionally inclusive community that it will continue to grow among multiracial realities.

Andrews University

School of Education

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF RACIAL DIVERSITY ON CHURCH GROWTH: A CASE STUDY OF BUFFALO SUBURBAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN LANCASTER, NEW YORK

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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December 2020

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

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External: David Penno	Date approved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGR	Annual Growth Rate
AAGR	Average Annual Growth Rate
BioGR	Biological Growth Rate
BSSDAC	Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church
CVGR	Conversion Growth Rate
DGR	Decadal Growth Rate
IRB	Institutional Review Board
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
TFGR	Transfer Growth Rate

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From boyhood, I knew God called me to His service. He has led my steps and directed me places I could have never imagined when I first committed my life into His hands. Many people have inspired and supported me along my academic journey, namely my parents, family, and teachers. I must thank my chairman and mentor, Erich Baumgartner, who has been a support and steadfast guide through my dissertation journey. I thank him for his insightful guidance and countless hours of dedication. Nonetheless, the accomplishment of this dissertation is ultimately the result of the constancy and faithfulness of my God. I shout a prayer of thanks to Him!

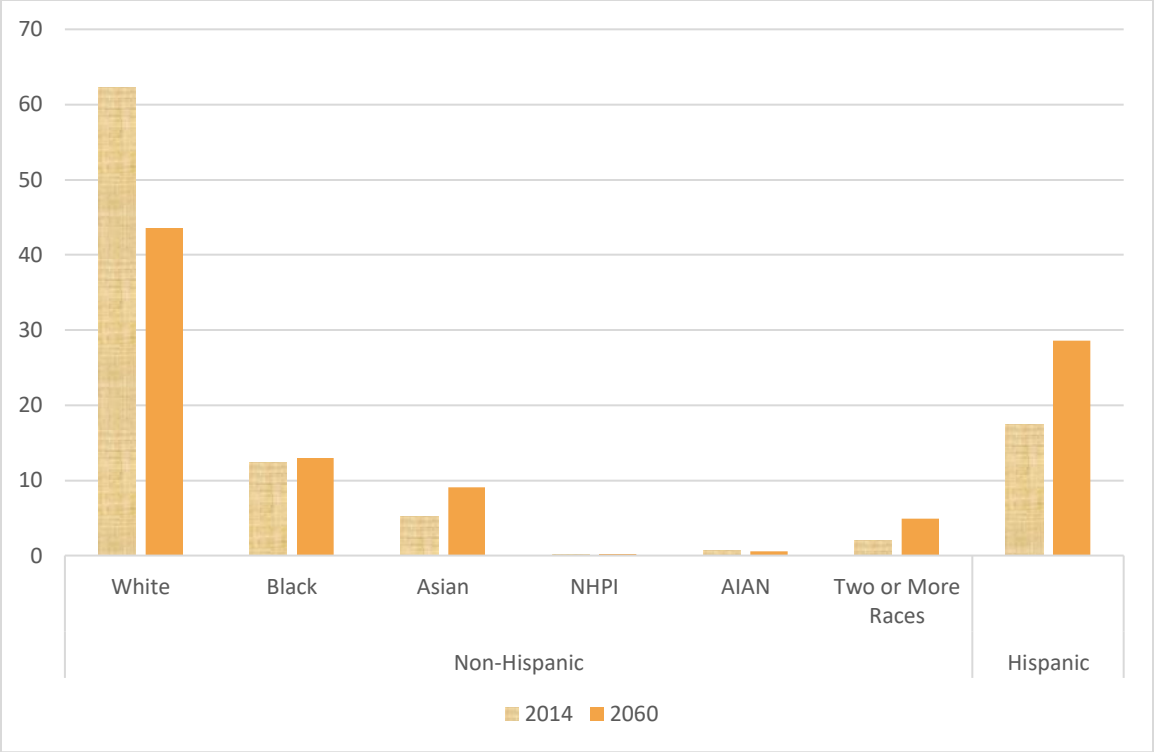
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The demographic statistics of the state of New York are an example that America is a multiracial nation. According to U.S. Census data population estimates for the state of New York from 2015, the racial composition showed: Hispanic or Latino 18.8%; White 55.8%; Black or African American 14.4%; American Indian and Alaska Native 0.2%; Asian 8.4%; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander 0.0%; Some other race 0.6%; Two or More Races 1.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This census data reflects the multiracial reality in New York.

Ortman and Guarneri (2009) predict that "the United States is expected to experience significant increase in racial and ethnic diversity over the next four decades" (p. 3). Colby and Ortman (2015) describe projected population percentages from 2014 to 2060 utilizing the U.S. Census Bureau 2014 National Projections data. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the projected population percentages by racial categories and Hispanic origin.

Although the non-Hispanic White population is currently over 60% of the U.S. population, its percentage is projected to drop to 44% by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). The Two-or-More-Races population is projected to triple, being the fastest growing group. The Asian population is projected to almost double, being the second fastest growing group.



Legend: NHPI = Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander; AIAN = American Indian and Alaska Native

Figure 1. Distribution of the population percentages by race and Hispanic origin: 2014 and 2060.

As the third fastest growing group, by 2060 the Hispanic population is projected to be one-quarter of the U.S. population. The projected population percentages of the other three racial groups are expected to remain stable.

Christ expected diversity to be a prominent feature of the Christian church. In Matthew 28:19 He mandated to go and make disciples from all nations. Thus, Jesus' original instructions for evangelism were inclusive. In Revelation 7:9 Jesus revealed to the apostle John the future of the church as a big crowd of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language worshiping together.

Despite the growing American population diversity and the Scriptural picture of a church sent to the nations in an all-inclusive plan for Christian outreach resulting ultimately in a vast multiracial group worshiping together in Heaven, the current reality of the Christian church in the United States is generally racially segregated. Edwards (2008) says: "Indeed, religion, particularly Christianity is arguably the most racially segregated institution in the United States" (pp. 5-6).

There are, however, more and more signs that things do not have to stay that way. Racial segregation does not have to stay the norm. Instead, there are signs that the development of multiracial churches is possible as congregations strive to respond to take Christ's plan for the church to be an inclusive community that breaks down barriers (Eph 2:14) seriously. This dissertation seeks to explore the experience of one of these churches that experienced a transition from a dominantly White congregation to a truly multiracial congregation.

Background of the Problem

According to Barczak (1968) the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC) traces its history back to when a group of 12 people began meeting in Buffalo. In November 1885 the group was organized as the First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Buffalo. By 1920 the membership had increased to 100. The congregation purchased a church building at 92 Hedley Place and opened a church school as well. Around the 1940s evangelism resulted in 110 new members. By 1959 the membership was 395 and the congregation had outgrown its building. At this time a group of 60 members formed a separate group, planting a new church in South Buffalo. In September of that year a church was purchased at Norwood Avenue and West Ferry Street. The

church school was continued. The church name was changed to the Norwood Seventh-day Adventist Church of Buffalo. This church building had many significant structural problems and the church went into great debt. The building was sold in 1965 and the congregation rented facilities until land could be purchased and a new church built. According to Young (1983) in December 1982 the congregation and church school moved to its current location at 5580 Genesee St., Lancaster, NY. The name of the congregation was changed at this time to Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC).

In June of 1990 *Ministry Magazine* published an article on celebration churches within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination (Newman & Wade, 1990). According to Newman and Wade (1990)

> celebration church is a loosely defined phenomenon… The idea behind these churches is to make Sabbath worship services a time of celebrating our joy in the Lord, and to change the worship service to emphasize this joy.

BSSDAC was one of three churches selected for analysis. BSSDAC was of specific interest in the study as an innovative worship service had been introduced about five years prior by pastor Eoin Giller, and at the time of the analysis the church was pastored by Edward Couser. The aspects that were noted in the three celebration churches visited were: use of instruments in the worship service, emotion in worship, Sabbath Schools, church growth, emphasis on God's love and forgiveness, and use of the name Seventh-day Adventist. These elements, although not unique to celebration churches, were observed in all three churches.

Newman and Wade (1990) pointed out that in BSSDAC the worship service began with congregational songs to instrumental music accompaniment, including piano,

organ, guitars, flutes, trumpets, trombones, violins, saxophone, and percussion with drums. Words for the praise songs were projected on a screen and there was some clapping by people in the audience. There was a time for congregational interaction and welcoming. The remainder of the service followed a typical traditional order of service with the closing song from the church hymnal. BSSDAC was noted to have well-organized Sabbath School classes. Among the church members God's love and forgiveness was emphasized and people experienced a feeling of acceptance. Newman and Wade (1990) noted that the church sign read "Lancaster Christian Community Center; underneath in smaller print the sign identifying the church says Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church" (p. 28). They suggested that BSSDAC tried to be welcoming to the community and minimize the connotation that only SDAs were welcome.

According to Newman and Wade (1990) the innovative worship style implemented at BSSDAC appeared to have a positive impact on the weekly service attendance. Here is their analysis of the results:

> What are the results of this type of service? The Buffalo church, with a membership of 260, averaged 60 to 70 in attendance before Giller came. By the time he left four years later, average attendance had jumped to 180. The day we visited, one year after he had left, 145 persons attended. Baptisms were not spectacular during this period (29 baptized), but many nonattending members began to return. (p. 28)

The increase in attendance was coming more from the return of non-attending members than new converts. However, this doubling in church attendance within four years was attributed by some long-tenure church members to an openness to variety in worship style, music, and participants, which ultimately increased opportunities for involvement by church members.

In addition to the innovative worship style introduced in the late 1980s in BSSDAC, the church also had to deal with another phenomenon: racial diversity. As it began to embrace that phenomenon it grew into a multiracial church. Over the last two decades different authors have started to identify a multiracial church using the 80/20 criterium: a single race cannot comprise more than 80% of the congregation, thus 20% of minority representation is enough in order to qualify a church as multiracial (DeYmaz & Li, 2010; Dougherty, 2003; Emerson, 2006; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Schwadel & Dougherty, 2010).

Per recollection of long-tenure church members, BSSDAC was traditionally a predominantly White congregation. However, over the last 12 years this changed. From 2008-2009, 51 Karen immigrant members from Burma joined the congregation. Subsequently the Asian membership grew to its 2019 figure of 128, with weekly attendance averaging 80. In 2013-2014 there were a large number of Black immigrants who joined the church. In 2019 the Black or African American membership totaled 154, with weekly attendance averaging 116. Still, BSSDDA had never had a non-White pastor until I came in December 2015. I identify with two races: Black and White, with Hispanic heritage.

To determine if BSSDAC qualifies as a multiracial church following the 80/20 criterium, I asked several church leaders and members to examine the membership list with me and identify the racial category for each member. We used the same categories as utilized by the U.S. Census Bureau in categorizing racial diversity: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017c). Hispanic is utilized as an identification of

origin in conjunction with the racial categorization (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017d). A person may fall into more than one racial category, represented by the Two or More Races category. The results of this analysis showed that BSSDAC qualifies as a multiracial church following this 80/20 criterium. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the 2019 membership by racial categories and Hispanic origin.

Figure 2 shows that the 2019 year-end membership of BSSDAC totaled 575 and was comprised of 222 White, 154 Black/African American, 128 Asian, 9 Two or More Races, 32 Other, and 30 Hispanic. The category *Other* are members on

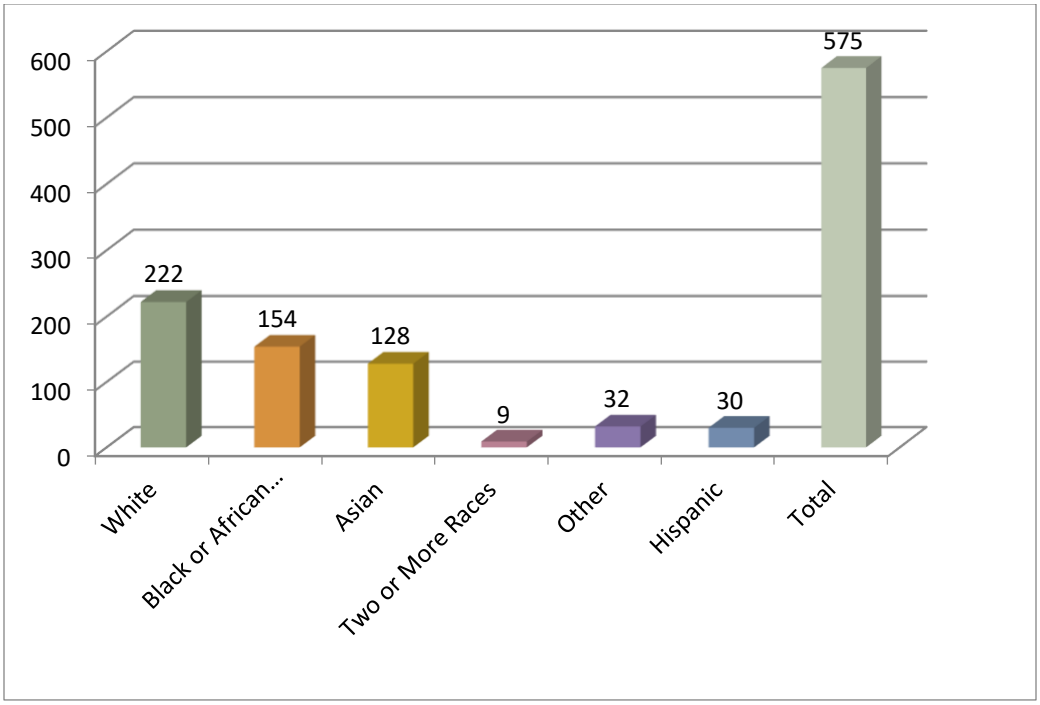
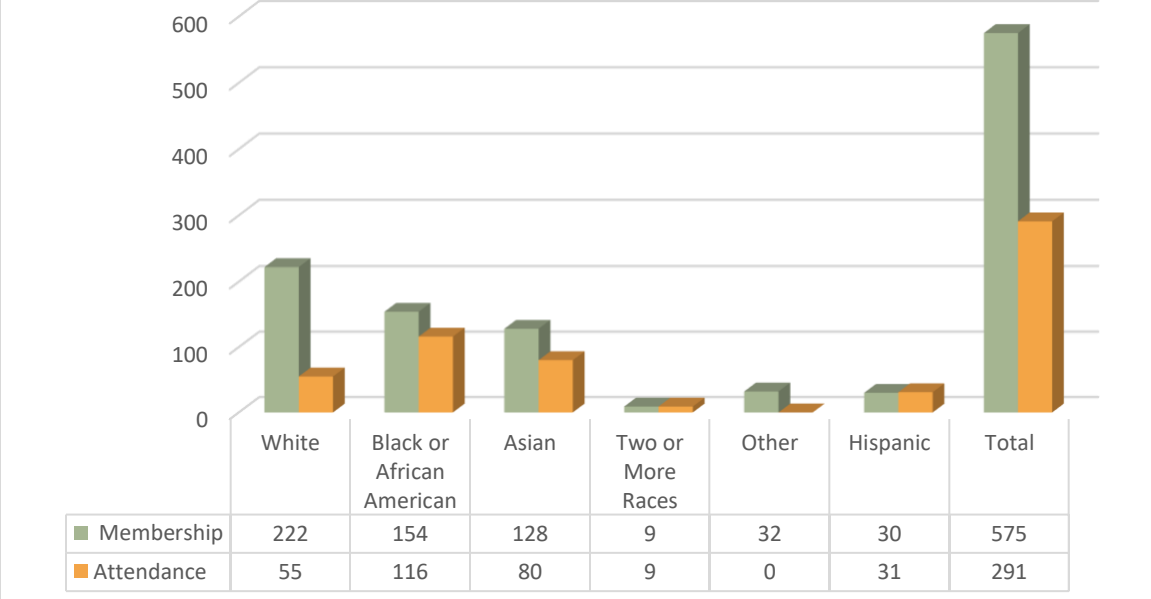


Figure 2. BSSDAC 2019 membership analysis.

the church records that were not known by the church leaders and are not currently attending and thus cannot be identified as to racial category. Although *Hispanic* is not one of the five racial categories, it is an identification of origin utilized in conjunction with racial categorization (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017d). Those that were identified as Hispanic were not identified in one of the racial categories.

We also analyzed the attendance trends in BSSDAC. Average attendance represents the number of people who attended the weekly church service on average. It was determined by averaging the weekly church service attendance figures provided by the church clerk and church elders. Figure 3 records the 2019 membership with corresponding average attendance figures broken down by racial categories and Hispanic origin.



	White	Black or African American	Asian	Two or More Races	Other	Hispanic	Total
Membership	222	154	128	9	32	30	575
Attendance	55	116	80	9	0	31	291

Figure 3. BSSDAC 2019 membership/average attendance.

As shown in Figure 3 average attendance by race and Hispanic origin is: 55 White, 116 Black/African American, 80 Asian, 9 Two or More Races, and 31 Hispanic. The average attendance percentage by racial category is 19% White, 40% Black/African American, 27% Asian, 3% Two or More Races, and 11% Hispanic. This racial distribution shows that the church is not only multiracial based on church membership, as demonstrated by Figure 2, but is also multiracial in church attendance.

How did this transformation into a multiracial congregation affect the growth of the church in membership? The annual growth rates from 2008-2019 are shown in Figure 4. The annual growth rates vary from 1.45% up to 16.33%. The lowest growth being seen in 2018 versus the highest growth in 2008.

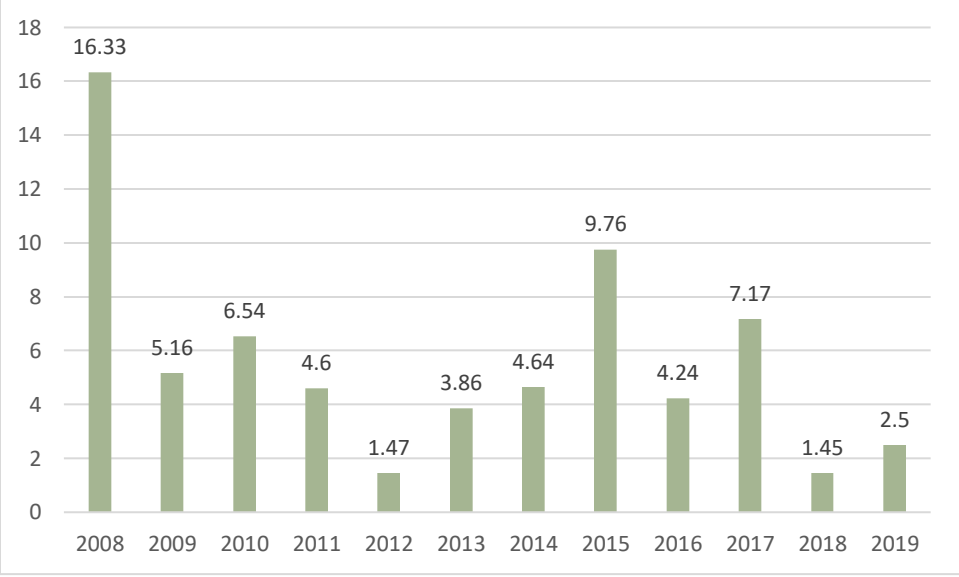


Figure 4. BSSDAC annual growth rates: 2008-2019.

In order to determine if BSSDAC qualifies as a growing church for this study, I calculated the average annual growth rate, a statistic, according to Towns (1995), that states growth in church membership over a period of years. Church growth experts characterize an AAGR greater than 7.2% as *good growth*. Based on this criterium, BSSDAC qualifies as a growing church with an AAGR of 7.64% (Towns, 1995; Wagner, 1979; Zackrison, 1997). The raw data for this calculation is given in Table 1.

Table 1 displays the 12-year growth analysis of BSSDAC: 2008-2019. The analysis reveals a decadal growth rate of 91.67%; conversion growth rate of 24.67%; transfer growth rate of 52.00%; biological growth rate of 15.00%. The annual growth rate ranged from a low of 1.45% in 2018 to a high of 16.33% in 2008 which gave us an average annual growth rate of 7.64%.

The *conversion growth rate* is calculated with the number of non-SDA persons that were baptized minus the number of persons that were dropped from membership as a percentage of the initial membership. However this calculation could be missing some individuals that were actually conversions because the category profession of faith can also include conversion growth. Based on the SDA record keeping system it is not possible to distinguish whether the profession of faith entry was a conversion or a transfer. In the case of BSSDAC it can be assumed that the majority of profession of faith entries represent transfer growth and can be explained by the Karen and African refugees.

Table 1

12-year Growth Analysis of Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church: 2008-2019

Year	Beginning Members	Ending Members	Baptisms non-SDAs	Baptisms SDA kids	Profession of Faith	Transfer in	Transfer out	Death	Dropped	AGR
2007*		300								
2008	300	349	6	2	44	0	1	1	1	16.33
2009	349	367	11	5	7	0	4	1	0	5.16
2010	367	391	6	1	17	8	2	6	0	6.54
2011	391	409	4	9	6	3	3	1	0	4.60
2012	409	415	2	7	9	1	10	1	2	1.47
2013	415	431	6	3	10	2	1	4	0	3.86
2014	431	451	9	4	9	0	0	1	1	4.64
2015	451	495	10	5	29	12	10	2	0	9.76
2016	495	516	5	7	12	9	11	1	0	4.24
2017	516	553	12	14	15	3	3	4	0	7.17
2018	553	561	1	7	6	2	8	0	0	1.45
2019*	561	575	6	7	2	7	4	4	0	2.50
TOTAL			78	71	166	47	57	26	4	

* Analysis is for 12 years, 2008-2019

Analysis:			Legend:	
	DGR	91.67	DGR	Decadal Growth Rate
	AGR	variable	AGR	Annual Growth Rate
	CVGR	24.67	CVGR	Conversion Growth Rate
	TFGR	52.00	TFGR	Transfer Growth Rate
	BioGR	15.00	BioGR	Biological Growth Rate
	AAGR	7.64	AAGR	Average Annual Growth Rate

The *transfer growth rate* is calculated with those who joined by profession of faith plus those who transferred in minus those who transferred out as a percentage of membership. The transfer in (SDA members coming from another SDA congregation) and transfer out (SDA members leaving for another SDA congregation) are based on letters of transfer. Again, the profession of faith category is not always transfer growth, but in the case of BSSDAC it is assumed that the majority in this category are transfer.

The *biological growth rate* is calculated with the baptism of children of SDA parents minus the death of SDA members. This category of growth is straightforward.

A significant number of the new members fall in the category profession of faith, shown in detail in Table 1. Profession of faith is defined in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* by General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2010):

> Individuals who have accepted the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and who desire membership in the Church on profession of faith may be accepted under any of the following four circumstances: 1. A committed Christian coming from another Christian communion who has already been baptized by immersion as practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. 2. A member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who, because of world conditions, is unable to secure a letter of transfer from his/her home church. 3. A member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church whose request for membership transfer has received no response from the church where he/she is a member. In such a case the church shall seek assistance of the conference or conferences involved. 4. An individual who has been a member, but whose membership has been misplaced or has been withdrawn because he/she was a missing member, yet who has remained faithful to his/her Christian commitment. (p. 51)

Of these four circumstances for profession of faith, number two is the most common one that applies to the majority of members who joined by profession of faith from 2008 to 2019. They joined by profession of faith based on the inability to obtain transfer letters due to world conditions. Most of these individuals were Karen and African refugees who came to Buffalo. Although there could be a few exceptions, which

based on SDA record keeping are impossible to trace, the category profession of faith is categorized as transfer growth in this analysis of BSSDAC growth.

The two highest growth years are 2008 with an AAGR of 16.33% and 2015 with an AAGR of 9.76%. The greatest impact for these high growth years is from transfer growth (recorded in the profession of faith category). Thus the high growth years are impacted by the large influx of refugees in those years. The lowest growth year is 2018 with an AAGR of only 1.45%. As the pastor during 2018, I can explain the low growth in numbers in that year with my focus more on developing and strengthening church ministries along with nurturing current members, with less focus on evangelism. This has been my pattern in ministry to alternate emphasis in these areas. Although evangelism and nurturing are always present, in my ministry I tend to alternate periods of strong emphasis between evangelism and nurturing of current members.

Statement of the Problem

Because the Christian church in the United States has often been racially segregated (Edwards, 2008), prominent church growth advocates have advised churches to use racially segmented strategies for church growth (Gibbs, 1986; McGavran, 1970; McIntosh, 2004; Towns, 1995; Wagner, 1979, 1993, 2010; Zackrison, 1997).

Although historically churches in America were racially segregated, multiracial churches have begun to emerge (Blum, 2007; DeYmaz, 2020b; DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, & Kim, 2004; Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Emerson, 2006, 2008; Garces-Foley, 2007, 2011; Warner, 2004). This trend parallels the increase in racial diversity in America, and more specifically in New York (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, 2015). Emerson (2008) indicates that the increase of racial diversity in the United States is

impacting churches. Some churches are beginning to experiment with more racially diverse forms of outreach (DeYmaz, 2020a, 2020b; Dougherty, 2003; Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Marti, 2009; Minatrea, 2004; Stetzer & Putman, 2006; Woo, 2009). One of those churches was BSSDAC.

Numerous authors point to Scripture which promotes racial inclusion in the Christian church. Racial inclusion leads to multiracial churches (Anderson, 2004; DeYmaz, 2020a; Foster & Brelsford, 1996; Gibbs, 2000; J. J. Lewis, 2008; Loritts, 2014; Minatrea, 2004; Ortiz, 1996; Rodriguez, 2011; Rusaw & Swanson, 2004; Woo, 2009). Still multiracial churches are not the norm.

The multiracial church in the United States is an emerging social establishment forming as a result of both the increase in racial diversity and changing attitudes relating to racial diversity (Emerson, 2008; Garces-Foley, 2007). Positional leaders influence the development and racial integration of a multiracial church (DeYmaz, 2020a; Dhingra, 2004; Foster & Brelsford, 1996; Garces-Foley, 2011; J. J. Lewis, 2008). Many issues can arise in a multiracial church such as cultural identity and racial inclusiveness (Emerson, 2006; Garces-Foley, 2011; Ortiz, 1996; Yancey, 2003; Zackrison, 1993).

The role of race and the problem of racial discrimination in church is notable (Blanchard, 2007; Dougherty, 2003; Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Edwards, 2008; Emerson & Smith, 2001; Marti, 2005; Mather, 2011; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008; Yancey & Kim, 2008). Racial demographic changes impact churches (Blanchard, 2007; Dougherty, 2003; Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Emerson & Smith, 2001; Mather, 2011; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). Attitudes toward racial diversity shifted, with younger

church members being more accepting (Dougherty, 2003; Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Mather, 2011).

In recent years, several theories have been advanced to deal with issues of racial discrimination and racial diversity issues. For instance, racial discrimination in church can be understood with the Critical Whiteness theory (Dhingra, 2004; Edwards, 2008; Tranby & Hartmann, 2008). Dougherty and Huyser (2008) referenced the inclusive identity theory to understand racial diversity in church. Yancey and Kim (2008) highlighted the influence of diversity on open-mindedness. Marti (2009) used the ethnic identity theory to explain integration of individuals in a multiracial congregation.

There is clearly an emergence of literature on multiracial churches. However, this literature on multiracial churches typically does not address the issue of church growth. This means that there is little research on growing multiracial churches that could assist congregations facing the growing racial diversity in their ministry context in their quest to effectively evangelize their communities. Thus the problem in this dissertation is that we do not know the factors impacting church growth in multiracial churches. This dissertation focused on the growth of a racially diverse church with a nearby racially diverse community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC) in Lancaster, New York.

Research Questions

This study was guided by a central research question and more detailed sub-questions. The central question guiding this study is:

In what ways has racial diversity influenced the growth of Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC), Lancaster, New York?

The sub-questions of this study are:

1. How did BSSDAC become a racially mixed congregation?
2. What are the perceived elements (principles, factors) that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation from the perspective of church leaders and members?
3. How has the emerging racial diversity of BSSDAC contributed or hindered the growth of the church from the perspective of church leaders and members?

Methodology

As the researcher determines which method would best fulfill the purpose of the study, different approaches utilized in qualitative research are possible: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Each approach differs in its process of data collection, data analysis, and eventually the final outcome of the research. Each approach is thus suited to different types of research situations and desired results and should be selected accordingly (Creswell, 2013).

The case-study method was selected as the most fruitful qualitative research approach to be used in my research project. Yin (2014) describes case study methodology as doing research on a selected case from an actual current situation.

Creswell (2013) identifies three subsets of case studies: instrumental, collective, and intrinsic. In an instrumental case study (Stake, 2010), a select issue is explored within one select case. In a collective case study a select issue is also explored, but within the context of multiple cases (Creswell, 2013). The intrinsic cases study is focused on describing a case, like a program evaluation (Stake, 2010). I selected the instrumental case study approach to explore the influence of racial diversity on the growth of BSSDAC, a multiracial church in Lancaster, New York. Data collection was done through focus groups of church leaders and members, and a review of any available church and membership records. In respect for the time of church leaders and members participating in the research, my data collection was mainly through focus groups. Data analysis was performed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software.

Significance of the Study

In performing a literature search on multiracial churches and church growth, I found literature describing church growth among monoracial churches (Elkington, 2011; Williams, 2011) but not among multiracial churches. The literature did indicate that there was a rising phenomenon of multiracial churches (Emerson, 2008). Through an extensive literature review, Emerson revealed that the concept of a multiracial church in America originated over 100 years ago, gained momentum paralleling the demographic diversification most prominent over the last 20 years, and became a big focus in religious literature over the last 10 years. However, the literature did not specifically address church growth in the context of multiracial churches. This case study contributed to the knowledge base of multiracial church growth through the example of a growing multiracial SDA church.

The results of this study were important for me personally as an SDA pastor working in a growing multiracial SDA church. It improved my understanding of the dynamics found in a multiracial church. It also helped me to understand the significance of my role as a pastor and leader in shaping and operating a multiracial church.

I hope that this case study might also inspire other SDA pastors working in multiracial churches. It could help pastors see the pivotal link that pastors play between their church and a diverse community. The pastor can potentially facilitate the development and growth of a multiracial church with commitment and vision.

I hope that the findings of this study also help other Christian pastors in their attempt to evangelize multiracial communities in fulfilling the Gospel commission Jesus gave the church. While this study focuses on an SDA church that is part of a connectional system in which pastors are assigned to a local congregation from a central conference office, pastors in the Adventist denomination have a lot of freedom to shape the attitudes of the congregation towards the community context of the local congregation. Furthermore, the role of the pastor overlaps with the role of many other denominations. This study sheds light on the influence pastors have on developing a climate that uses the multiracial character of the congregation as an opportunity for growth rather than as a barrier.

I hope the findings can benefit lay leadership teams of churches. BSSDAC experienced the benefit of an inclusive lay leadership and ministry team that intentionally chose to model acceptance and embrace racial diversity. Perhaps our experience can influence other lay leadership teams to be intentional in embracing diversity in

leadership. This in turn might enable their churches to also become more inclusive and more intentionally embrace diversity within the congregation.

I hope the findings are relevant for administrators in SDA denominational offices. In the SDA church there is multilevel administration, with churches grouped into conferences, conferences into unions, and unions into divisions. The findings may influence conference administrators in hiring pastors with a commitment to multiracial ministry. It may influence administrators at any level to facilitate training and education on multiracial churches, diversity, and cultural competence.

Delimitations

I focused my research to a single congregation: Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lancaster, New York. Further delimitations were present in the boundaries implicit in my stated purpose that guided the creation of interview questions.

Limitations

Limitations were implicit in the study design: case study. The most notable limitation for data collection was that I was both the researcher in this case study while also the pastor of the target church. The focus group participants (local church leaders and members) may not have answered some of the questions truthfully, or may not have told me the whole story, or may not have shared their true perceptions. Since I studied one specific congregation in a specific context, the results of this case study are not generalizable. This does not mean however that other churches cannot learn from what this case study revealed about the different dynamics at work in BSSDAC in Lancaster, New York.

Definitions

The subsequent definitions help the reader and myself to have the same understanding of terminology that is used in this study.

Annual growth rate (AGR) is a statistic that states growth in church membership/attendance over a one-year period. To perform the calculation figures are entered into an equation from two consecutive years. According to Towns (1995) "This year's membership [minus] last year's membership / [divided by] last year's membership x 100 = AGR. The AGR is read as a percent of annual growth" (p. 20).

Average annual growth rate (AAGR) is a statistic that states growth in church membership/attendance over a period of years. The figures are entered into the following equation as stated by Towns (1995): "This year's membership – your first year's (base) membership / your base membership/ number of years being examined x 100 = AAGR. The AAGR is read as a percent of annual growth" (p. 23). My calculation is 575 (membership end 2019)- 300 (membership 2007)/ 300 (membership 2007)/12 x100= 7.64%.

Church growth is a complex phenomenon with wide-ranging interpretations. It concerns not only the increase in number of church members but also the development, operations, and dynamics of the church (Gibbs, 1986; Towns, 1995; Wagner, 2010).

Decadal growth rate (DGR) is a statistic showing the rate of net increase in church membership/attendance over a ten-year period. Figures are entered into the following formula given by Towns (1995): "the latter membership/attendance figure, minus the earlier membership/attendance figure x 100 = DGR. Your DGR is expressed as a percentage of decadal growth" (p. 125).

Key informants are defined by Schwadel and Dougherty (2010) as "a small number of knowledgeable individuals per organization" (p. 367). In national research studies of congregations, a common data collection method utilizes key informants. For example in the FACT 2010 congregation research, a key informant is identified as the pastor, a church administrator, a staff member, or a well-informed lay leader (Institute of Church Ministry, 2010).

Multicultural church encompasses people representing distinct cultures (Towns, 1995; Zackrison, 1993).

Multiethnic church is identified by Garces-Foley (2011) as "an inclusive, ethnically diverse community" (p. 15). Also defined by Zackrison (1993) as "a situation in which various ethnic groups are involved" (p. 16).

Multiracial church according to a general consensus among authors is identified as a church in which no single race can comprise more than 80% of the congregation, thus 20% of minority representation is enough in order to qualify a church as multiracial (DeYmaz & Li, 2010; Dougherty, 2003; Emerson, 2006; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Schwadel & Dougherty, 2010). As Emerson (2006) put it:

> My binary definition of a multiracial congregation is one in which *no one racial group comprises 80 percent or more of the people*. That is, to be classified as multiracial, more than 20 percent of the congregation must be racially different than the largest racial group…. My continuous definition of a multiracial congregation is based on a measure called the general *heterogeneity index*. It measures *the probability that two randomly selected people in a congregation will be of different racial groups*. (pp. 35-36)

*Primary Identity***,** as articulated by Pollard (2000) should be centered in the gospel:

> The challenge for Christians is to allow the gospel to establish primary identity… Race and ethnicity are relocated to a secondary level of identity. Race and

> ethnicity…are no longer the defining realities of our existence… race and ethnicity are endowments to be use, not possessions to be worshiped…Love for Christ is the law… to win as many as possible… cross-cultural service is motivated by "agape," sacrificial love for others. (pp. 19-20)

Quantitative church growth is statistically measurable. Towns (1995) defines it as "an increase in membership and worship attendance in a given local church" (p. 329).

Racial categories are used by the U.S. Census Bureau (2017c) following the 1997 Office of Management and Budget standards on race. The five racial categories are: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017c) each of these five categories are explained:

> White – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.
>
> Black or African American – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
>
> American Indian or Alaska Native – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
>
> Asian – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
>
> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

Regional conferences are defined according to the *Working Policy* of the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2015)**:**

> Regional Conferences are recognized organizational entities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the North American Division. The structure was formally adopted in 1944 at the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Committee to provide for the organization of black- administered conferences where membership,

> finances, and territory warranted. They are called Regional Conferences and bear the same organizational relationship to their respective unions as other conferences. Regional Conferences follow the practice of open membership without regard to race, color, or national origin. (pp. B23-24)

Worship style relates to participants, language, type of music, and religious rituals including music, singing, and prayer (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Edwards, 2008; Jenkins, 2003).

Legitimacy of Using Race to Classify People

In today's society, race is a controversial term in regards to its legitimacy in classifying people. This begs the question as to how the racial classification system began. Pollard (2009) claims:

> Racism as a social phenomenon in the United States has a distinct and specific history. Racism was intimately connected to the perpetuation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a part of the legitimization of the slave trade, the dehumanization of Africans arose from a reclassification of what it meant to be "human." (p. 12)

Pollard (2009) points to Carolus Linnaeus in 1735 as the first scientist to classify people into racial groupings. He was followed by Georges Cuvier and Samuel Morton in the 19th century. Kolbert (2018) identifies Samuel Morton, a physician and scientist in Philadelphia, as "father of scientific racism." Morton studied human skulls, classifying them into five races. Morton claimed this was a divine hierarchy that reflected levels of intelligence, placing whites at the top and blacks at the bottom. Recognizing modern science Kolbert attributes Craig Venter, an American biotechnologist and leader in the human genome sequencing, to have stated "The concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis." Furthermore, Kolbert (2018) claims:

> Just because race is 'made up' doesn't make it any less powerful. To a disturbing extent, race still determines people's perceptions, their opportunities, and their experiences. It is enshrined in the U.S. census.

Thus although 21st century science demonstrates that the use of racial categorization actually has no scientific legitimacy, Kolbert acknowledges that American society is still affected by Morton's racial distinctions which impact individuals, communities, and the nation at large. Coinciding with Kolbert's conclusions, Blakemore (2019) affirms:

> Though race has no genetic basis, the social concept of race still shapes human experiences. Racial bias fuels social exclusion, discrimination and violence against people from certain social groups. In turn, racial prejudice confers social privilege to some and social and physical disparities to others, and is widely expressed in hierarchies that privilege people with white skin over people with darker skin colors.

Furthermore the social impact of racial categorization is also clearly portrayed by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (2021)

> The dictionary's definition of race is incomplete and misses the complexity of impact on lived experiences. It is important to acknowledge race is a social fabrication, created to classify people on the arbitrary basis of skin color and other physical features. Although race has no genetic or scientific basis, the concept of race is important and consequential. Societies use race to establish and justify systems of power, privilege, disenfranchisement, and oppression.

Despite the reality that racial categorization has no scientific legitimacy, originated with racial discrimination and is based on observable unchangeable physical characteristics, however it has significant social implications. Notwithstanding the notion that race is not an appropriate scientific classification system, it is very real. As articulated by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (2021)

> The notion of race is a social construct designed to divide people into groups ranked as superior and inferior. The scientific consensus is that race, in this sense, has no biological basis – we are all one race, the human race. *Racial identity*, however, is very real. And, in a racialized society like the Unites States, *everyone* is assigned a racial identity whether they are aware of it or not.

These social implications of racial terminology are the reasons for which I chose to utilize racial categories in this research. However when reading about race, it appears at times that race, ethnicity and culture are used interchangeably. This led to the question: Is race the same as culture or ethnicity?

Selection of Terminology: Multiracial

Blakemore (2019) defines race as "a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits," whereas ethnicity as "large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background." Blakemore further connects the term race with skin color whereas ethnicity to cultural expression, stating "both are social constructs used to categorize and characterize seemingly distinct populations."

As defined above, race and ethnicity are not simply interchangeable terms. Furthermore Blakemore (2019) clarifies the terms race and ethnicity have implied distinctions:

> Race and ethnicity are often regarded as the same, but the social and biological sciences consider the concepts distinct. In general, people can adopt or deny ethnic affiliations more readily than racial ones.

This statement implies that race is something that is fixed, whereas ethnicity is potentially flexible. In the church literature I also came across the use of different terms: *multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural*. These terms were at times used interchangeably, however multiple authors chose their terminology with clear purpose. Thus my selection of terms needed further consideration. My selection of the term *multiracial* as opposed to *multicultura*l or *multiethnic* in this dissertation is not without

great thought and care. However, I am not the first to sort through the explicit and implied meanings of these related terms used to identify congregations.

Emerson (2006) utilize the term *multiracial*. He explains his reasoning for not selecting the terms *multicultural* or *multiethnic*:

> *Multicultural* is an imprecise and misleading term. Though culture is often taken as synonymous with race or ethnicity, it clearly is not… By linking race and ethnicity with culture, the term assumes that any congregation with multiple ethnicities is also a congregation with people of multiple cultures… The term *multicultural* also can imply that congregational life and structures are multicultural. To define a congregation with a term subject to multiple untested assumptions, then, seems unsound. (pp. 34-35 footnote)

The term *multiethnic* is also used in the literature. However, Emerson (2006) also disagrees with this term:

> Because it is more specific, this term more accurately captures a congregation with parishioners from a variety of people groups. I do not use the term here because it is not the best term for what I wish to examine. I am not interested, for example, in including in my definition congregations that are made up partly of people of Swedish heritage and partly of people of Polish heritage, or those that are partly Honduran and partly Guatemalan. (pp. 34-35 footnote)

I agree with the rational of Emerson in not choosing the term *multicultural* or *multiethnic*. I too am not interested in identifying cultural or ethnic differences, but rather focusing on racial differences in my study.

I want to point out that by choosing not to use the term *multiethnic* or *multicultural* in my research, by no means do I negate the presence of ethnic or cultural differences. As Emerson points out, there are clear social and cultural distinctions between different ethnic groups. However it is the racial differences that create more social problems as Yancey (2003) points out:

> I argue that in our society racial differences carry more social significance than ethnic differences. While ethnicity can be a barrier to understanding between members of

> diverse groups, especially if we are dealing with first-generation immigrants, usually racial distinctions create the most problems in our society. (p. 17)

Thus, by my choice of terminology, using race instead of ethnicity or culture, in my research I am not emphasizing ethnic or cultural distinctions. For example, I am not making a distinction among Blacks that are ethnically identified as Caribbean-American versus African-American versus African immigrant. However, I am not negating ethnic and cultural differences by not choosing to point them out. Rather, in my research I wish to specifically focus on race. In conclusion, I agree with the reasoning of Emerson and Yancey in the selection of the term *multiracial*. By using the 80/20 criterium to identify multiracial churches, I have a measurable term that will allow me to make a distinction between a monoracial and a multiracial church.

Note that despite the generally accepted 80/20 criterium, Emerson (2008) acknowledges that the literature reveals a lack of agreement on exact terminology, which includes multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, and interracial. Emerson states that according to publications by different researchers, these terms are not interchangeable as they each tie to different theoretical perspectives, conceptualizations, and in some cases theological positions. In explanation, Emerson posits, to some, race is the key issue. Others claim ethnicity is a more modernized term, saying race merely identifies the human race. Another perspective proposes that culture should be the focus as opposed to race or ethnicity. Therefore, Emerson concludes that the terminology is not interchangeable, with each term having its own significance and inference. However, for my dissertation research study I chose to use the term *multiracial* as I felt it best represents what I was looking to measure and compare in the study.

Summary

Chapter 1 described the problem of racial segregation in American society and the development of the multiracial church. The chapter discussed the background and statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, significance of the study, delimitations and limitations. The definitions of key terms were given followed by a detailed discussion for selection of the terminology: multiracial.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on church growth, diversity in America and in the church, and the multiracial church. Chapter 3 outlines the guiding research questions and describes the qualitative case study approach used in the study, including self as the instrument, participant observation, purposeful sample, data collection procedures, strategies for validating findings, reliability, data analysis, IRB, data reporting, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the documents analyzed and the focus group findings. Chapter 5 concludes with an overview and discussion of the main findings. Conclusions and recommendations are provided.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC) in Lancaster, New York. In this chapter I review the relevant literature on church growth and multiracial churches.

Since this study focuses on the growth of a racially mixed church I first review the vast body of literature on church growth to ascertain how growth is measured statistically, modeled, what principles explain growth and what barriers have been documented. Next follows literature regarding diversity in America and in the church. Subsequently, the focus narrows on the multiracial church: its definition, history, theological views, potential issues, and the role of race within the church. Multiple race theories are explored to provide a perspective on the fundamental element of racial diversity in multiracial churches. Finally, trends in multiracial churches are described.

Church Growth

There is a plethora of literature on church growth. This section is subdivided into background, statistics, models, growth principles, and barriers. This literature on church growth will provide a framework to understand the emergence of multiracial churches.

Background

McGavran (1970) describes church growth as effective evangelism, emphasizing Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28. As documented in the constitution of the North American Society for Church Growth, Wagner (2010) authored a formal definition of church growth that is widely accepted: "Church growth is that discipline which investigates the nature, expansion, planting, multiplication, function and health of Christian churches as they relate to the effective implementation of God's commission to 'make disciple of all people' (Matthew 28:18-20)" (p. 114).

Similarly, both Towns and Zackrison define church growth as implementation of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. According to Towns (1995) church growth can be understood as

> The science that investigates the nature, function and health of Christian churches as they relate specifically to the effective implementation of God's Commission to 'make disciples of all nations (peoples)' (Matthew 28:19). Church growth is simultaneously a theological conviction and an applied science, striving to combine the eternal principles of God's Word with the best insights of contemporary social and behavioral sciences. (p. 72)

Zackrison (1997), a Seventh-day Adventist expert on church growth, expands on the concept of the Great Commission, stating:

> The Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 is the key to church growth. It presents a total plan, including growth in numbers, spiritual maturity, and in the number of ministries carried out by a church… The Adventist view is that the Great Commission is valid for all time (see Fundamental Belief No. 11, Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual). For instance, Ellen White writes that 'the very life of the church depends on her faithfulness in fulfilling the Lord's commission' (Desire of Ages, p. 825). Though the Great Commission includes more than numbers of converts, it indicates that numbers of converts is an ultimate goal of the church. You can only disciple, baptize and teach warm-blooded human beings. The church has to grow in numbers in order to fulfill the Great Commission. (p. 10)

The church growth movement associates church growth with church health, stating that a healthy church will grow whereas a church that is not growing is not healthy (Wagner, 1979). According to Gibbs (1986):

> Church growth is extremely complex, involving not only the make-up of the church membership, but also its history, the kind of situation in which it is placed, its distance from or involvement with the community, and background factors in the nation as a whole which may contribute to spiritual receptivity. (p. 10)

Wagner (1993) adds that "church growth means all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with him and into responsible church membership" (p. 12).

As suggested by these authors, the meaning of church growth is broad. Hoge and Roozen (1979) claim that "study after study reaches the same conclusion: There is no single cause or simple pattern of causes related to church growth or decline. Rather, growth or decline involves a complex pattern of multiple and often interacting factors" (p. 39). Wagner (1993) adds: "Simply put, church growth is complex. There is no way it can be reduced to a simple formula or canned program" (p. 29).

Nonetheless these authors all suggests that the term *church growth* incorporates reaching new people and discipling them to become involved in ministry to reach more people.

Statistical Analysis of Church Growth

In order to measure the effectiveness of the methods used by a church, the church growth movement emphasizes the use of statistical analysis in the assessment of church growth. Towns (1995) provides a guideline for evaluating a church's growth rate that originated with the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. It was

developed using decadal composite membership measurements for churches in both the United States and Canada. According to Towns (1995) church growth can be categorized by percentage growth per decade. Towns church growth scale ranges from 25% to 500% decadal growth (p. 78). He identifies less than 25% decadal growth as just biological versus 500% decadal growth as incredible. A decadal growth of 100% correlates with an average annual growth rate (AAGR) of 7.2%, which he identifies as good growth.

In referring to standard growth percentages for decadal church growth, Wagner (1979) utilizes the same scale for church growth as Towns, while Zackrison (1997) provides a scale of 25% to 200%. In contrast to Towns, both Zackrison and Wagner identify 25% growth as poor because it encompasses merely biological and thus minimal growth that can be achieved without reaching people who are not yet within the reach of the church.

The number of visitors a church has also affects church growth. Arn (1997) identifies the "national visitor retention rate is 8 to 12 percent" (p. 29). He explains that typically between 8 and 12% of church visitors will become active members within a year. Tracking all this statistical information is an important tool to measure church growth.

Models

Because church growth is complex with multiple factors at work simultaneously, some hindering while others favoring church growth, looking only at church membership is not enough. Membership growth is an overall result of many other things being in place. Different authors have wrestled with this complexity and developed models to talk about the complexity of church growth. Here I will introduce four different models of

church growth: the medical model, the life cycle model, the church growth wheel, and the missional model. Wagner (1979) outlines a medical model that tracks different church factors as either vital signs or diseases. Arn (1997) describes a life-cycle model of church growth. Towns (1995) provides a detailed model of church growth that he entitles the church growth wheel. More recently, Elkington (2011) presents a circular model of church growth, which he refers to as a missional model. Table 2 provides a summary of these four models.

The Medical Model

Wagner (1979) uses a model of church growth that he bases on the biblical analogy of "the body of Christ" (Ephesians 1:22-23). Within the framework of what Wagner calls the medical model, he identifies seven vital signs and eight diseases or pathologies that relate to church growth in Anglo-American churches.

Seven vital signs

In the medical model, Wagner (1979) identifies seven vital signs present in healthy growing churches: the pastor, the people of the church, church size, structure and functions, membership drawn from a homogeneous unit, outreach methods, and priorities. He claims that the role of the pastor is fundamental in church growth. The people of the church are the mobilized laity. The impact of church size on church growth is relative. Wagner argues that three key elements of infrastructure in a healthy church provide the vital functions of: "membership [the total church]… fellowship [large groups within the church] … spiritual kinship [in small groups]" (Wagner, 1979, p. 282).

Table 2

Four Models of Church Growth

Medical model by Wagner	Life cycle model by Arn	Church growth wheel by Towns	Missional model by Elkington
Seven vital signs	*Three states*	1. Outreach	1. Liminality
1. Pastor	1. Infancy	-natural/spiritual	-recognizes current situation
2. People of church	-purpose driven		
3. Church size	-sense of mission	2. Organization	2. Communitas
4. Structure and function	-dedication of members	-natural/spiritual	-members fitting in and connecting
5. Homogeneous unit	-motivated by outreach		
6. Methods		3. Leadership	3. Emergence
7. Priorities	2. Maturity	-natural/spiritual	-Spirit led preparation and outreach
	-reaches comfortable size		
Eight church growth diseases	-plateaus	4. Discipleship	4. Mission
1. Ethnikitis	-institutionalized	-natural/spiritual	-sow, reap, grow
2. Old age			
3. People-blindness	3. Death		This model is circular and repetitive
4. Hypercooperativism	-starts declining		People:
5. Koinonitis	-lost passion		-join the church
6. Sociological strangulation	-community changed		-become part of the community
7. Arrested spiritual development			-embrace the mission
8. Saint John's syndrome			

(Arn, 1997; Elkington, 2011; Towns, 1995; Wagner, 1979)

Wagner also observes that growing churches seem to attract new members from basically one homogeneous unit. Although methods may be situational, growing churches have identified effective evangelistic methods that work for their setting. Finally, properly arranged priorities means evangelism holds the number one priority in outreach, with social service outreach not taking precedence.

The homogeneous unit principle was perhaps the most controversial characteristic of a growing church, yet it fit the churches Wagner was studying. The term homogeneous unit originated with McGavran (McGavran, 1970). It simply identifies a group of people based on some common characteristic, whether it is cultural, political, linguistic, socio-economic, or something else. Wagner (1978) claims that churches typically grow in homogeneous units with an estimated 95-98% of churches in America being homogeneous in the 1970s. Gibbs (2000) explains this to mean that people are more prone to join a church with members who are similar to themselves. Whereas if people do not see people similar to themselves, they will likely feel they do not belong.

Wagner (1979) suggests that in the church growth movement research paradigm, the first step is to identify the people and the second step is to identify the growing churches within each people group. "A 'people' is defined as a significantly large sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another" (p. 273). The elements commonly identified are racial group, social class, regional identity, and rural-urban location. To identify these *peoples* (Wagner, 1979, p. 273), McGavran (1970, p. 85) uses the term *homogeneous units* similar to Gordon (1981, pp. 51-54).

Wagner (1979) acknowledges that many Christian theologians and ethicists suggest minimizing cultural divisions and groupings. However, the church growth movement takes the reality of culture very seriously, contending that "Christianity spreads best when people are converted with a minimum of social dislocation" (p. 274). McGavran (1970) states: "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers" (p. 198). Accordingly, Wagner (1979) claims that empirical data indicates that churches grow in homogenous units:

> Churches that decide to try to meet the needs of a variety of people usually find that they have growth problems. It is not possible for one church to meet the needs of everyone in the community for an extended period of time. Conglomerate congregations that grow well are a rarity. This does not mean that the Christian ethical code permits deliberate discrimination or racism. It only means that the most natural way for a church to grow is among one people at a time. Churches in mixed communities may well find that some individuals from other homogeneous units will join their church and feel comfortable. In an open society there are always some who desire to leave the culture of their roots and assimilate into another culture…. The larger the church, the more built-in tolerance there is for a wider spectrum of peoples, since smaller fellowship groups will usually form within them among people of differing homogeneous units…. Thus, while there are churches that include people from more than one homogeneous unit, they are few in number across the board and have a more difficult time growing than do homogeneous unit churches. (pp. 277-278)

There is a counter argument to the homogeneous unit concept. Wagner (1979) concedes that opponents to the homogeneous unit concept claim it is racist and advocate that the church should stand against segregation. Furthermore, there are exceptions to each homogeneous unit remaining tied to its own people group. For example, Hispanic Americans are a culture that may assimilate into Anglo-American culture by assuming its way of life. Intermarriage between two races creates a unique group who may seek a multiracial church to which to belong.

Gibbs (2000) points out the dangers of the homogeneous unit idea. Applying the homogeneous unit, conservative evangelical Christians often inappropriately equate Christianity with an American lifestyle. Although Wagner (1979) seems to suggest that the homogeneous unit idea is a normative principle, Gibbs (2000) argues that the New Testament does not support this idea, stating that the homogeneous unit is static and overlooks the dynamics of multiracial settings, thus potentially inhibiting church growth. In fact, Gibbs claims that the homogeneous unit is an inadequate approach to church growth in urban settings. He explains that in an urban environment there is a dynamic interaction between homogeneous and heterogeneous circumstances, with a reciprocal influence between them. According to Gibbs (2000):

> A church that identifies exclusively with one group may live a self-centered, impoverished life. If that group dwindles, so the church will face extinction. Furthermore, given the high population density and high level of heterogeneity in many urban areas, for a church to run exclusively on homogeneous lines may result in the spiritual isolation and exclusion of the majority of the surrounding population. (p. 128)

Walrath (1979) adds further to the line of thought that homogeneous unit does not account for change:

> Church organizations, especially at the parish-local congregational level, is built on the assumption that society and its institutions will change very little, if at all. Tradition is given prominence in nearly every aspect of the church's life. Persons who are older and wise tend to be seen as best equipped to hold leadership positions. The church's value system affirms social control over nearly every change…. Deep social change brings huge problems to the stable based, locally oriented church. (pp. 248-249)

Thus, in a country like America that is increasingly becoming racially diverse, the homogeneous unit concept is confronted with change. A once monoracial church located in a predominantly monoracial community may now find itself in an increasingly multiracial community. Thus the question arises: Will the church isolate itself and

remain homogeneous? or will it open its doors to the community and embrace racial diversity?

Eight church growth diseases

According to Wagner (1979) there are also eight church growth diseases that have been identified in the medical model of church growth: Ethnikitis, Ghost Town, people-blindness, hypercooperativism, hypopneumia, koinonitis, sociological strangulation, arrested spiritual development, and Saint John's syndrome. *Ethkinitis* is described as contextual community shift. *Ghost Town Disease* designates a church that dies out within a dying community. *People-blindness* is caused by the failure to recognize the homogeneous unit principle. *Hypopneumia* suggests a lack of Holy Spirit power. *Koinonitis* identifies an inwardly focused fellowship that only pays attention to existing relationships. *Sociological strangulation* indicates a church community that is outgrowing its facility, i.e. parking and sanctuary size. *Arrested spiritual development* describes a membership that does not mature spiritually. And finally, *Saint John's syndrome* refers to the "lukewarm" condition of a church that no longer is faithful to its mission (Revelation 3:15-16).

Ethnikitis, typically occurring in an urban setting, is the term Wagner uses for a contextual community shift (Wagner, 1979). When the original church members of a community move away and a new people group moves into the neighborhood, the church is destined to die if it is not able to minister to its new neighbors, even though for a time the old members may be willing to commute in. However, although Wagner (1979) originally stated that ethnikitis leads to the death of a church, he later co-authored a book with Towns and Rainer in which they provide a remedy to the problem:

> ['Ethnikitis'] is the inbred allegiance of the church to one ethnic group and its lack of adaptation or openness to other groups. This disease occurs when communities change their ethnic character and churches fail to adapt to those changes. Sometimes a symptom of ethnikitis is what has been called 'White flight,' where the traditional WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) churches move out of their traditional communities as the ethnic character of the area changes.
> In our growing nation, our churches must be multiethnic, reaching out to every new family or group of people moving into our neighborhoods. In one sense the small neighborhood church is a homogeneous unit, yet the growing church must be a heterogeneous unit (the open door to all people) made up of homogeneous cells (classes and cells that will attract and minister to each group within its neighborhood). The church that suffers ethnikitis is first, sinning against God, second, disobeying the Great Commission, and third, allowing a cancer to fester within its body. (Towns, Wagner, & Rainer, 1998, pp. 11-12)

In the same book, Towns et al. (1998) give five suggested steps to solve ethnikitis: start small groups, hire church staff to match racial representation of attendees, begin multilingual preaching, do church planting, and actively seek to reach out to new diverse groups (pp. 11-12).

People-blindness is another factor tied to the homogeneous unit principle (Wagner, 1979). The homogeneous unit principle identifies a group of people based on some common characteristic such as cultural, political, linguistic, or socio-economic; however People-blindness fails to recognize the homogeneous unit. Wagner compares this disease to the body's response to a tissue transplant. A church may die in response to "sociological tissue rejection" (p. 285).

Life Cycle

Another model of church growth is what Arn (1997) identifies as a life-cycle approach, building on the organizational life-cycle model developed by Kenneth Boulding in 1950 (Ionescu & Negrusa, 2007). Arn (1997) identifies three stages in the typical local church life cycle: infancy, maturity, and death. In its infancy the church is

purpose-driven with an urgent sense of mission seen in the dedication of all members. In this stage it is motivated by outreach as it grows to maturity. Often this phase takes 10-20 years to fully grow. At maturity, the church has reached a comfortable size, at which point growth often plateaus, shifting from conversion to transfer growth. The church begins to focus on committees and becomes institutionalized. Thus when it reaches 40 to 50 years of existence, the church is typically declining and moving towards death. The founders' passion is now often missing and a compounding problem may be that the community has changed. Based on his research, Arn claims that over 80% of churches within America are at the stage of plateau or decline.

There are however churches, Arn (1997) acknowledges, that do not fit the typical life cycle. Instead, some churches grow in a stair-step pattern. For these churches there are interruptions that he terms "intervention events" in the normal life cycle that have enabled the churches to initiate new life cycles (p. 33). Often these new life cycles are initiated by a new pastor or the renewal of the laity who are part of the most common intervention events.

Church Growth Wheel

Towns (1995) developed a sociological modeling research tool to suggest the ministry and growth factors at work in growing churches. Towns' church growth wheel has four categories: outreach, organization, leadership, and discipleship; each category is separated into natural and spiritual factors (Towns, 1995, pp. 84-94). The inner circle indicates the "spiritual factors." The outer circle indicates the "numerical aspects of growth" (pp. 83-84).

Missional Model

Elkington (2011) developed the missional church model as a new approach to encourage growth among declining evangelical churches. It is a circular model which calls for the systematic and repetitive interaction of elements with the process of growth. People join the church, become part of the community, and embrace the mission. This circle keeps repeating in order to produce growth.

As central to the model is Ekington's notion of the church as a complex adaptive system that is dynamic and changing. He outlines four stages in the missional model's circular process: liminality, *communitas*, emergence, and mission. Liminality is the space in-between where the declining evangelical church realizes it is in jeopardy, has ineffective systems, and lacks influence. In the model liminality leads to *communitas*. *Communitas* in the church is described as fitting in and connectedness of members. Communitas evokes emergence, where each part does its work, the Holy Spirit directs the mission, and positional leaders equip and deploy. Mission evolves out of emergence. Elkington defines mission as sowing, reaping, and growing. When the fourth part of the cycle is reached, mission, it triggers the cycle again with liminality, and the cycle repeats.

Could what Elkington proposes in his model of church growth be applied to multiracial churches? Could it be that multiracial churches are more actively adapting to changes in a diverse environment and thus experiencing growth?

In his model, Elkington (2011) recognized the role of leadership. In order to generate growth, the positional leaders should adopt the biblical concept of servant leadership, risking self for others in order to motivate them to understand the priesthood of all believers. The positional leaders should promote the unity of the church, a sense of

community and belonging. Could this be significant as it relates to the growth of multiracial churches? Could the racial views held by the pastor influence his actions, and thus influence the congregation? According to Elkington, church rites like worship, prayer, and activities promoting togetherness give members a sense of belonging and a separation from a secular society. Perhaps positional leaders in a multiracial church do a better job at fostering church growth because they incorporate racially inclusive church rites?

Each of the four different models of church growth, although not based on multiracial churches, could be relevant to church growth in multiracial churches. The vital signs and pathology identified by Wagner (1979) are all elements that could play a role in the growth of a multiracial church, with the exception of the homogeneous unit concept and ethnikitis. The life cycle model, described by Arn (1997) and the main elements of the church growth wheel outlined by Towns (1995) could also be applicable to a multiracial church. Elkington's (2011) circular missional model of church growth, with change as an integral element, is relevant to the development of multiracial churches reaching out to an increasingly multiracial society. In addition to these models I will now highlight specific church growth principles that are often found in the church growth literature.

Growth Principles

As these models have shown, church growth is very complex. The church growth models discussed have pointed toward a multiplicity of church growth factors that different authors have wrestled with. It is interesting to note that many authors seem to develop different lists of growth principles that do not match exactly, but often overlap.

Table 3 lists the church growth principles identified by seven church growth specialists: (Emery, 1979; Gibbs, 1986; Kidder, 2011; McIntosh, 2004; McKinney, 1979; Parker, 1979; Zackrison, 1997). This table serves as a quick comparison between them. Note in Table 3 the growth principle impacted by origin was only identified by one church growth specialist. On the other hand, the growth principle outreach/ evangelism is purported by six out of the seven church growth specialists, while plans and goals is purported by five of the seven.

From a survey of 23 flourishing Seventh-day Adventist churches, Kidder (2011) groups church growth into four main aspects: empowering servant leadership, passionate and authentic spirituality, committed and active laity, and God-exalting worship. Although he categorizes these four aspects as the "big four," in his book Kidder clearly espouses 11 of the 13 church growth principles identified by other church growth authors. From a survey of 50 growing Wesleyan churches Emery (1979) drew his conclusion of three key factors distinctive to growing churches: attitudes, leadership, and outreach. Emery shares two of these three factors with Gibbs (1986), who performed a case study of 10 evangelical churches, from which he identified five elements of church growth: leadership, planning, structures, evangelistic initiatives, and pastoral provision. Gibbs shares three of these five growth principles with Zackrison (1997): leadership, plans, and evangelism. Emery, Gibbs, Kidder and Zackrison all share the growth principle, leadership, with McKinney (1979), who studied 263 United Church of Christ congregations, identifying three church growth areas: pastoral leadership, community

Table 3

Church Growth Principles

	Authors						
	Emery (1979)	Kidder (2011)	Gibbs (1986)	McIntosh (2004)	McKinney (1979)	Parker (1979)	Zackrison (1997)
Growth Principles							
God provides growth		x					x
Organic and complex/ discover facts				x			x
Spiritually gifted leadership	x	x	x				x
Pastor		x	x		x		
Plans and goals		x	x	x		x	x
Nurture/ edification		x				x	x
Outreach/ evangelism	x	x	x	x		x	x
Membership mobilized		x					x
Community ministry/ commitment to people		x			x	x	x
Worship/ structures		x	x			x	
Openness to change		x				x	
Attitudes/ sacrifice and faithfulness	x	x				x	
Impacted by origin					x		

ministry, impacted by origin. Of the three growth principles summarized by McIntosh (2004), evangelism is also identified by Emery, Gibbs, Kidder, Parker, and Zackrison; plans and goals is shared by Gibbs, Kidder, Parker and Zackrison. Referencing the book of Acts, Parker (1979) identifies seven characteristics of the church in Antioch that he feels have been present in growing churches throughout history. Sharing four of Parkers growth principles, Zackrison (1997) also enumerates seven foundational principles in church growth, none of which are unique to him.

Barriers

Church growth is not only enhanced by different factors, but may also be hindered by others. After summarizing church growth principles, it is appropriate to review what are identified as barriers to growth. Interestingly, Towns et al. (1998) suggest that growth and barriers coexist together. This infers that understanding and addressing church growth barriers is vital to facilitating continued growth. The first step in overcoming barriers is an understanding of both the reasons behind church growth and the factors required to overcome barriers (Towns et al., 1998). The second step is a commitment to growth and doing something about it. The skills needed to overcome barriers are in: leadership, ministry, relationships, and management.

Barriers can be categorized in different ways. One type of barrier to church growth, designated as E-0 to E-3, is cultural in nature and describes how many types of obstacles people have to overcome to respond positively to an evangelistic strategy. Growth experts talk of E-0 as internal barriers; E-1 is the stained-glass barrier; E-2 are cultural and class barriers, and E-3 are the most serious cultural barriers often characterized by language barriers (Towns et al., 1998). The E-1 barriers are what may

prevent people from coming in to receive the message. This may be inadequate parking, a bad location, or a run-down building. This may also include perceptions that may have been colored by past experiences. The E-2 barriers are that people of a culture different from the majority typically do not feel comfortable with or are unable to integrate with the membership. E-3 barriers are also cultural, the biggest element being language barriers. Although an individual may be bilingual, people prefer a religion that is expressed in their heart language.

When applied to a multiracial church setting, the E-2 and E-3 barriers come into question. However, although certain differences may pose a barrier to some, it may be attractive to others. For example, Arn (1997) describes how a multiracial church service is attractive to third-generation immigrants, the Baby Boomer generation, and "cultural chameleons" (p. 109). E-3 barriers related to cultural-difference issues and specifically language may pose a problem in multiracial churches.

Could it be that in a multiracial church, a multiracial leadership team with a focus on interracial relationships that is dealing intentionally with cultural barriers caused by racial differences could overcome both the E-2 and E-3 classes of barriers? Such a strategy, if successful, could be productive for church growth. Successful multiracial churches have found that to address E-2 and E-3 barriers they have to host services and programs in different languages.

Diversity in America and in the Church

In order to appreciate the significance of diversity in church and the role of multiracial churches, it is helpful to summarize the some of the trends in America. With

this perspective, the subsequent discussion will focus on diversity issues in church and the impact of demographic diversity on churches.

American Population and Diversity

There are four main phases of immigration to the United States (Zackrison, 1993). From 1776-1885 there were about 13 million immigrants mainly from Northern and Western Europe. They were predominantly from Protestant-faith backgrounds, spoke English, and were farmers by trade. Subsequently, the immigration of slaves from Africa was involuntary, but added thousands of new immigrants to the rural inhabitants. Then, from 1885-1924 there were about 25 million new European immigrants mainly from Russia, Italy, and Southern Europe. Most were Roman Catholic, Eastern or Russian Orthodox, and Jewish. These immigrants did usually not speak English and settled in cities. After 1965, influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, immigration occurred from Latin America, the Middle East, and the Pacific Rim.

Colby and Ortman (2015) detail projections of the composition of the U.S. population: "by 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone); and by 2060, nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign born" (p. 1). The U.S. Center for World Missions has identified 226 different people groups within U.S. immigrants (Arn, 1997). Stetzer and Putman (2006) and Tran (2006) acknowledge the fast-growing diversity in the United States. Tran (2006) goes on to say that instead of uniformity, many of these immigrants are contributing to societal diversity, which is significantly defining the future of America.

Diversity Issues in Church

Calvin B. Rock, a prominent Black leader in the Seventh-day Adventist church, who in addition to pastoring and writing, also served in administration as Oakwood University president from 1971-1985 and General Conference vice president from 1985-2002, describes the impact of ethnic solidarity in American society:

> Another reason to doubt Black America's cultural absorption is the strength of its ethnic solidarity. While the social and legal constraints placed upon the Black community by White America are largely responsible for the endurance of Black culture, it is also true that a major factor behind Black resistance to assimilation is the strong internal attraction of the culture itself. Black Americans, in the main, wish neither to forget nor abolish their distinctiveness. (Rock, 2018, p. 172)

While preserving ethnic solidarity, could exposure to diversity break down barriers between racially different groups in church? Vora and Vora (2002) acknowledge that racial prejudice is a significant issue in America, proposing that racial prejudices are heightened when White communities do not interact with those from other racial groups. Racial discrimination may result from social isolation within White evangelical churches. According to Emerson and Smith (2001) it is a common tendency for White evangelicals to congregate only with their own racial group. Mather (2011) suggests that this behavior strongly nurtures the state of racial isolation that is currently affecting Christian churches in North America. Vora and Vora (2002) performed a study to see if purposeful interaction between White college students and a friendly Black church community could alleviate racial prejudice.

The results show that the positive encounter between White college students with a Black church community generated positive attitudes in the White students toward Blacks, lessened their ethnocentrism, and provided an effective intercultural experience. Positive interaction between the two racial groups alleviated racial prejudice. This is

relevant because it provides an example of how purposeful interaction between different races provides the opportunity for alleviating racial prejudice. Perhaps having racially different persons in the context of a multiracial church may alleviate racial prejudices allowing the church to grow by benefitting from diversity.

Impact of Demographic Diversity

This section will highlight two historical studies that describe how demographic diversification in urban areas can specifically impact church growth. Hadaway (1981) studied the relationship between church growth and neighborhood population shifts. Guest (1989) also evaluated the impact of the local community on church growth. Zackrison (1993) suggests that urban areas are where multiracial ministry is found.

Hadaway (1981) presents a concept related to church growth known as adaptive constraints. According to Douglass and Brunner (1935), this means that there is a very strong connection between the neighborhood population surrounding a church and the church membership. Thus, changes in the neighborhood population will be reflected in the church membership.

Hadaway (1981) coded ten-year membership change in metropolitan churches in conjunction with the surrounding demographic characteristics for each of the five largest White Protestant denominations. He found the growth of White mainline Protestant churches in metropolitan areas were positively correlated with various factors in the surrounding neighborhoods including population growth, racial stability, higher socioeconomic level, and families with children. The impact of race is noted by Hadaway (1981):

> Racial change (increase in percent Black) was quite highly correlated with membership change, but in a negative direction. White churches tend to suffer greatly when racial transition occurs, and especially so when it happens rapidly. When 'White fight' develops through 'block busting' techniques or through the natural expansion of a Black community, there is typically not time for the church to make an orderly transition of membership from White to Black. Prejudice and the tendency of churches to be homogeneous compound the problems, and the result is that many churches in transitional communities either die or merge with churches in another part of the city. (pp. 82-83)

This study suggests there may be a significant inverse relationship between church growth and neighborhood population shifts (Hadaway, 1981). Hadaway found a decrease in church membership when racial diversification occurred in a neighborhood, specifically when there was a rapid shift from White to Black. He concludes that changes in the cultural environment and surrounding population of a church negatively influence changes in a congregations' membership.

A church's presence in a particular neighborhood is not enough to attract its residents, congregations need to intentionally adapt to the surrounding people in order to grow (Hadaway, 1981). The church must account for the needs and sociocultural background of those entering the community and seek to integrate them into the church.

Regarding the relationship of the surrounding neighborhood on church growth, like Hadaway (1981), Guest (1989) also evaluated the impact of the local community on church growth: "I primarily analyze the role of environmental influences such as social integration with the surrounding community, areal population growth and nearby population composition in determining the growth of churches during a five year period" (p. 436). He found that the membership increment of the growing metropolitan churches was strongly related to the environment where the church was located and the capacity of the churches to adapt to the needs of the people that surrounded them.

Consistent with the research of both Hadaway (1981) and Guest (1989), Walrath (1979) also suggests the potential impact of demographic diversity on church growth. He uses the term *latent function* to describe the covert purposes a church fulfills for the members, such as status or control (p. 267). When changes in membership occur due to community changes, a church may no longer be able to meet the latent functions of the original membership, nor adapt to meet the latent functions of the new members. Thus although having worship services, by not meet the needs of the attendees, it therefore declines. Walrath (1979) states:

> The social contextual factors are very powerful. Churches rarely escape their overwhelming influence, especially in a time of rapid social change. Congregations that thrive amid change generally are those that are able to relate effectively to their contexts, maximizing the positive factors, minimizing the negative factors, programming toward the context's future rather than hanging on to a past that sooner or later is bound to vanish. (p. 269)

Hadaway, Guest, and Walrath seem to suggest that an increase in racial diversity around churches does not automatically lead to church growth. The church must be open to this change, reach out to connect with the diverse community, and make adaptations within the church in order to attract, support, and sustain growth of racially diverse members.

Regarding racial diversity and the church, Stetzer and Putman (2006) state the focus should be broader than on how many un-churched people there are. It must also include how racially diverse this group is. Tran (2006) suggests that many Christian believers have embraced the idea of living with a racially diverse group of people. Stetzer and Putman (2006) conclude that it is up to the church to think of strategies for reaching out and connecting with the racially diverse.

Garces-Foley (2011) notes that in the last half century the attitude toward racial diversity has shifted significantly in the United States. However, she suggests that the level of acceptance varies with regions, populations, and educational level. For example, she states that young Americans that are raised and educated in metropolitan areas grow up in diverse neighborhoods and attend racially diverse schools. Therefore, according to Garces-Foley, this group will feel diversity is the norm. She suggests that young Americans are more likely to enjoy and appreciate diverse environments. Garces-Foley believes they would not feel out of place in an authentic multiracial church setting that mixes traditional elements from representative cultures.

Could the presence of multiracial communities in the area of Buffalo, NY, influence the formation and growth of multiracial churches? Could the response of churches to racial diversity impact the growth of the church?

The Multiracial Church

The previous section provided an overview of diversity in America and in the church. The following section will focus on the multiracial church examining its terminology and history. It will also present the Seventh-day Adventist perspective, theological views, potential issues, the role of race, and trends in multiracial churches.

Different authors have identified a multiracial church using the 80/20 criterium: a single race cannot comprise more than 80% of the congregation (DeYmaz & Li, 2010; Dougherty, 2003; Emerson, 2006; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Schwadel & Dougherty, 2010).

This definition originated with Emerson and Kim (2003) in the multiracial congregations project:

> We define a multiracial congregation as any congregation in which less than 80 percent of the members share the same racial background. Said differently, to be classified as multiracial, more than 20 percent of the congregation must be racially different than the largest racial group. We use 20 percent as the cutoff because research in race and gender relations in multiple contexts suggests that this percentage constitutes the point of critical mass. At this percentage, the proportion is high enough to have its presence felt and filtered throughout a system or organization. (p. 217)

Terminology

The selection of terminology: *multiracia*l as opposed to *multicultural* or *multiethnic* has both explicit and implied meanings. Although in this dissertation I selected the term multiracial, the literature incorporates all three different but related terms. Other authors have struggled with these key terms (multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial) used to identify congregations. Each author has their rationale for their choice of these terms (multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial).

Emerson (2006) utilizes the term *multiracial*. He explains his reasoning for not selecting the terms multicultural or multiethnic:

> *Multicultural* is an imprecise and misleading term. Though culture is often taken as synonymous with race or ethnicity, it clearly is not… By linking race and ethnicity with culture, the term assumes that any congregation with multiple ethnicities is also a congregation with people of multiple cultures… The term *multicultural* also can imply that congregational life and structures are multicultural. To define a congregation with a term subject to multiple untested assumptions, then, seems unsound. (pp. 34-35 footnote)

Emerson (2006) also disagrees with the use of the term *multiethnic*:

> Because it is more specific, this term more accurately captures a congregation with parishioners from a variety of people groups. I do not use the term here because it is not the best term for what I wish to examine. I am not interested, for example, in including in my definition congregations that are made up partly of people of Swedish heritage and partly of people of Polish heritage, or those that are partly Honduran and partly Guatemalan. (pp. 34-35 footnote)

Selection between these terms is not only based on area of interest by the author. It also has to do with the societal significance or implication of the term. According to Emerson (2006):

> The fundamental cleavage in the United States, in political, social and religious terms, is not ethnicity but race. The United States is the land of five melting pots (Hollinger, 1995), and these pots are socially constructed racial categories. Different national groups, regardless of their ethnicities and their preferences, are expected to adopt a racial identity, to meld into one of the five main "racial" categories- White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian. Currently, the U.S. government classifies people of Hispanic descent as part of a trans-ethnic group who can be of any race. But once one looks beyond immigrants, in everyday life, in political organization, in social networks, in people's perceptions, and in religious life, the category "Hispanic" or "Latino" operates as a racial category, that is, a fundamental cleavage along common physical characteristic/ancestry lines. I do not deny the major and important differences between ethnic groups of Latin, Asian, African, or European descent. Puerto Ricans are different from Mexicans; Karens are different from Filipinos. But these differences dissipate over the generations (partly by choice, partly by imposition), melding into socially constructed racial categories. For these reasons, I use the term *multiracial*. (pp. 34-35 footnote)

However, there are authors who would disagree with the selection of the term *multiracial*. Garces-Foley (2011) uses the term *multiethnic*:

> Even the choice of the label "multiethnic" rather than "multiracial" or "multicultural" requires churches to enter into the larger social debate about how we talk about diversity. How much diversity does it take to make a multiethnic church, and what kind of diversity counts? … What is the relationship between culture, race, and ethnicity? … multiethnic churches often struggle to determine how to frame their desires for diversity. (pp. 12-13)

She defines the multiethnic church "…*as an inclusive, ethnically diverse community*" (p. 15). In her book she tells the "…story of Evergreen and its transformation from a pan-Asian church to a multiethnic one" (p. 14). In explaining her choice of terms Garces-Foley (2011) acknowledges the potential implications stating:

> It may seem easy enough to use a demographic definition, like the 80/20 racial split of the Multiracial Congregations Project, but this approach has several limitations. First, using the traditional racial categories to identify diversity ignores all the other ways in which American choose to identify themselves, especially multiracial

> individuals but also those who prefer to identify with the country of their ancestors rather than an ascribed racial category. Insisting that only racial diversity matters excludes all those who do not neatly fit into these categories and ignores the significant diversity within them. Second, the 80/20 definition pays attention only to demographics and does not take into consideration the dynamics of interaction within the congregation. (pp. 81-82)

It is debatable that by choosing to use the term *multiracial*, an author is ignoring other ways in which individuals may wish to be identified. Perhaps by choosing the term multiracial, the author is not insisting that only racial diversity matters, but is rather simply stating that in their research they are specifically focusing on the diversity that is represented by racial diversity.

Emerson (2006) explains why he also disagrees with Garces-Foley in regards to the 80/20 criterium only relating to demographics. According to Emerson (2006):

> One can define congregations in binary terms- either they are or are not multiracial- or in continuous terms- they are more or less multiracial. I define and use both… My binary definition of a multiracial congregation is one in which *no one racial group comprises 80 percent or more of the people*. That is, to be classified as multiracial, more than 20 percent of the congregation must be racially different than the largest racial group. This is not an arbitrary figure. I use 20 percent as the cutoff because research in race and gender relations in multiple contexts suggests that 20 percent constitutes the point of critical mass… My personal experience of studying these organizations concurs. More than 20 percent of the congregation must be of another racial or ethnic background for their presence to make noticeable differences.
> My continuous definition of a multiracial congregation is based on a measure called the general *heterogeneity index*. It measures *the probability that two randomly selected people in a congregation will be of different racial groups*. (pp. 35-36)

Thus Emerson utilizes the 80/20 criterium to define a congregation as multiracial. Yancey (2003) agrees with Emerson (2006) in selection of the term multiracial, also supporting use of the 80/20 criterium. Yancey (2003) states:

> In defining a multiracial church it is important to assess the percentage of people who are a different race than the majority racial group in the church…. For the purpose of this book I will define a multiracial church as a church in which no one racial group makes up more than 80 percent of the attendees of at least one of the major worship services… I will define multiracial churches with this 80 percent criterion, even if

> some may disagree with this definition, since there is sociological evidence that such churches differ from monoracial churches…
>
> While ethnicity is a concept that is similar to race, there are important distinctions that have to be acknowledged. Generally, ethnicity refers to groups that have cultural distinctions, while race is used to denote groups that are perceived to be physically different from each other…. Ethnicity can be a very important factor in examining social divisions. It might be argued that multiethnic is a better term to use than multiracial. Multiethnicity also has a sounder scriptural basis since different ethnic, but not racial, groups are discussed in the Bible… Multiethnic congregations of that time likely engendered the same types of difficulties as multiracial congregations face today… I argue that in our society racial differences carry more social significance than ethnic difference… usually racial distinctions create the most problems in our society… To examine how Christians can overcome the most intense social barriers, we must look towards multiracial, rather than just multiethnic, churches. (pp. 15-17)

Thus, Yancey suggests that he selected the term *multiracial* in defining diverse congregations based on the social implications. In our society there are greater social barriers based on racial differences than cultural or ethnic ones. Yancey (2003) also points out that multiracial churches may also be multicultural. However *multicultural* encompasses a broader scope and is not as clearly definable as the term *multiracial*. According to Yancey (2003):

> The term *multicultural* has been used to enunciate dimensions such as gender, age, sexual preference and regional differences. Given the comprehensive way that the concept of multiculturalism is commonly used, I believe that it is too vague a term to use. (p. 18)

The selection of the term *multiracial* instead of the terms *multiethnic* or *multicultural* does not negate the presence of ethnic or cultural differences. As Emerson and Yancey point out, there are clear social and cultural distinctions between different ethnic groups. However as Yancey (2003) also points out, it is the racial differences that create more social problems:

> I argue that in our society racial differences carry more social significance than ethnic differences. While ethnicity can be a barrier to understanding between members of

> diverse groups, especially if we are dealing with first-generation immigrants, usually racial distinctions create the most problems in our society. (p. 17)

Note in the subsequent literature review that despite the generally accepted 80/20 criterium, Emerson (2008) acknowledges that the literature reveals lack of agreement on exact terminology, which include *multiracial*, *multiethnic*, *multicultural*, and *interracial*. Emerson states that according to publications by different researchers, these terms are not interchangeable as they each tie to different theoretical perspectives, conceptualizations, and in some cases theological positions. Emerson posits, to some, race is the key issue. Others claim ethnicity is a more modernized term, saying race merely identifies the human race. Another perspective proposes that culture should be the focus as opposed to race or ethnicity. Therefore, Emerson concludes that the terminology is not interchangeable, with each term having its own significance and inference. This is also the reason why in this study I am using the term *multiracial*.

History of Multiracial Churches

Dougherty and Emerson (2018) assert:

> The troubled history of American race relations birthed congregations and denominations divided by race… Martin Luther King (1956) decried 11:00 am Sunday morning as the most segregated hour in Christian America. (p. 25)

Emerson (2008) traces the history of multiracial churches in the United States from an origin of racial segregation in the American Christian church. He identifies the earliest proponent from as far back as 1899, W.E.B. Du Bois, who was known for contrasting the *Negro Church* with the *White Church*. According to Emerson, from 1899 through 1960, Du Bois spoke out against racial segregation in churches. Blum (2007) states that Du Bois viewed the separation of Black and White churches as racial

segregation, calling it a detestable behavior, with religion at the center of White supremacy and racial inequality. Du Bois proposed that racial segregation within the church erroneously provides a religious justification for White supremacy, trying to normalize and legitimize racial division, and equate "Whiteness with godliness" (p. 16).

DeYoung et al. (2004) describe nearly complete racial segregation among churches up until the 1940s when an attempt arose to promote racial integration within churches among a few select congregations, marking the start of integration of races through the religious community. Blum (2007) notes in the 1950s some churches were openly protesting segregation, while including Blacks and Latinos in their churches. DeYmaz (2020b), documented an increase from 6% in 1998 to 16% in 2019 of multiracial/multiethnic congregations across all faiths nationwide.

Patterning the gradual development of multiracial churches, Emerson (2008) located only three publications on multiracial churches that dated from the 1940s through the 1960s. In the 1980s, there arose three more publications, including Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller. Emerson noted a sudden upsurge in publications regarding multiracial churches during the 1990s, with this amount more than tripling in the 2000s.

The interest in racially diverse congregations trended with the demographic changes in the United States (Emerson, 2008). Although historically the United States was mainly a Black/White nation, global economic and social changes in conjunction with 1960s new immigration laws fostered immigrants from various national origins. Emerson (2008) referenced that in the 1960s, there were 12% people of color in America, the majority of these African American. However, by 2008 diversity was broader than just Blacks and Whites, with 35% people of color, only a third of these African

American. This shift influenced the perception of race and diversity within the religious community (Emerson, 2008). Garces-Foley (2007) acknowledges that this increase in racial and cultural diversity includes Christian immigrants. Warner (2004) adds "The new immigrants represent not the de-Christianization of American society but the de-Europeanization of American Christianity" (p. 20). Emerson (2008) notes that multiracial congregations typically included Hispanic, Asian, and either Blacks or Whites. The multiracial church in the United States is an emerging social establishment forming as a result of both the increase in racial diversity and changing attitudes relating to racial diversity (Emerson, 2008; Garces-Foley, 2007). Dougherty and Emerson (2018) identify three primary drivers in congregational racial diversity synthesized from the literature on multiracial churches: the racial-ethnic composition of a neighborhood, the religious tradition or denomination, and congregational leadership.

Seventh-day Adventist Perspective

Fundamental belief number 14 entitled: "Unity in the body of Christ" states:

> The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013)

Thus, according to the Seventh-day Adventist statement of beliefs, the denomination is supportive of multiracial congregations. The church holds a position of racial acceptance and inclusion. Fundamental belief number 14 regarding unity specifically states that racial categorization should not be divisive.

Theological Views

The Bible addresses the issue of race within the church. Numerous religious authors speak out against racial discrimination and segregation, suggesting racial inclusion will lead to multiracial churches. Positional leaders are noted to be pivotal factors in the formation and development of multiracial churches.

Scripture promotes acceptance of diversity and racial inclusion in the Christian church. According to Matthew 28:19, Jesus mandates the early Christian church to go and make disciples from all nations, dictating evangelism as all inclusive. DeYmaz (2020a) cites Romans 1: 14-15, where Paul, a Jew, preached the Gospel to both Greeks and Barbarians; John 4:4, where Jesus himself passed through Samaria. DeYmaz concludes that the church of today must also obey God's command to preach to all people. In Acts 2: 7-13, the Holy Spirit came upon the early disciples enabling them to speak to the different racial representations that were gathered in Jerusalem. In Revelation 7:9 Jesus revealed the future of the church as diverse: people from every nation, tribe, people, and language.

Numerous authors and researchers speak against racial discrimination in the context of church and emphasize inclusion and welcoming of racial diversity in church (Anderson, 2004; DeYmaz, 2020a; Foster & Brelsford, 1996; Gibbs, 2000; J. J. Lewis, 2008; Minatrea, 2004; Ortiz, 1996; Rodriguez, 2011; Rusaw & Swanson, 2004; Woo, 2009). According to (Gibbs, 2000) and Rusaw and Swanson (2004), church outreach should be racially inclusive of anyone in the surrounding community, not limited to geographical groups. Ortiz (1996) suggests that when churches do not welcome the racially different, they offend and misrepresent God. Rodriguez (2011) asserts that every

person should be treated with respect for his racial uniqueness, acknowledging that racial barriers are of human creation. Ortiz (1996) and Rusaw and Swanson (2004) concur that outreach toward different racial groups is not to shape them according to the majority's image, but rather to help them become part of a community of believers. Minatrea (2004) adds that lack of acceptance for racial diversity is detrimental to the church. He purports that in an increasingly multiracial environment, a church that does accept racial diversity is likely to die.

It seems racial inclusion leads to multiracial churches. Woo (2009) believes God intends churches to be multiracial, have one church body, and avoid racial divisions, concluding race segregation disintegrates the body of Christ. He claims that multiracial churches of North America emerged through struggles with racial bias and racial divisions, providing Wilcrest as an example of a multiracial church where people from all races now worship together. Pollard (2012) articulates:

> One fact that will not go away is that the 21st century demands a generation of servants who are cross-culturally competent! Our greatest need on the ground is for believers having the spiritual maturity and personal security to see in every person a candidate for the kingdom of God. (p. 8)

Anderson (2004) uses the illustration of an orchestra to show how the church should relate to racial diversity, proposing Christians from different racial representations must come together as a choir of races under the direction of Jesus Christ to play with their lives a song of unity.

Issues in a Multiracial Church

There are potential issues within the context of a multiracial church. Zackrison (1993) divides these issues into four main categories: language differences; cultural

differences; socio-economic differences; and education, training, and worldview differences. He explains that for congregations sharing the same facility, language differences may lead to communication issues in regards to the use of space, services, and staff. Cultural differences can be problematic in aspects such as communication, understanding, adaptability, and cross-cultural training. Socio-economic differences have the same potential problems as cultural differences in addition to worship music and style and suitable customs. The area of education, training, and worldview differences implies varying perspectives on aspects of church mission, evangelism, organization, and the pastoral role.

Zackrison (1993) states from a church pastor's point of view, there are three categories of issues that may arise in a multiracial church. These are identified as: multiethnic/multicultural consciousness, multiethnic/multicultural sensitivity and understanding, and multiethnic/multicultural ministry.

Multiethnic/Multicultural Consciousness

Zackrison (1993) suggests that multiethnic/multicultural consciousness is where the church pastor and members have cross-cultural contact, understand the effect of cultural filters, and are aware of cross-cultural issues. He describes cultural filters as an unconscious process of receiving and interpreting information, with the input and output potentially being different. According to Zackrison (1993) "Out of the cultural filter comes stereotypes, perceptions, traditions, customs, old wives tales, superstitions, etc." (p. 13).

For example an issue faced in a multiracial church is how to preserve cultural identity. Ortiz (1996) suggests in some churches, the racially different may be perceived

as intruding with their cultural differences. In a predominantly White church, the White members may perceive the racially different as an intrusion or threat if newcomers try to preserve their cultural uniqueness. This is more likely to happen when people are not used to living with racial diversity, thus incoming minorities may feel discriminated against in church.

The need to create racial inclusiveness arises in a multiracial church. Yancey (2003) claims that the members of a multiracial church develop interracial relationships through the institutionalization of the church as a multiracial one. He states that in a multiracial church, the value of every race is appreciated, with no race viewed as superior to another. Yancey implies that in this way people focus on the church as a body instead of focusing on racial differences.

Multiethnic/Multicultural Sensitivity and Understanding

Zackrison (1993) suggests that multiethnic/multicultural sensitivity and understanding develops from an attentiveness to the dissimilarities in cultures. He states that there are various obstacles that arise in multiracial churches: language differences; socioeconomic differences; racial stereotypes and physically observable differences; social customs, manners and more. Five key areas that mark significant cultural differences have to do with: time, space, the role of authority and social control, decision-making process, and nature of property.

Garces-Foley (2011) explains that multiracial churches can become loaded with tension among the members, which can result from barriers to acceptance amidst differences between member's race, physical appearances and customs. She suggests

inclusiveness is important. Promoting racial diversity in the church may work best when it is accompanied by a sense of community.

According to Emerson (2006) monoracial churches have the tendency of promoting cultural assimilation, which Zackrison (1993) defines as "The process by which persons and groups acquire the sociophysiological characteristics of other persons and groups, and are incorporated with them in a common cultural life" (p. 15). In contrast, Emerson suggests that individuals attending a multiracial church are more supportive of being unique while sharing and participating with people from different racial backgrounds, accepting racial differences, and seeking to preserve their individual cultural values while enriching themselves from others that are culturally different. Diversity is attractive to at least some members (Emerson, 2006).

Multiethnic/Multicultural Ministry

Multiethnic/multicultural ministry: The initial step for a church in developing a multiethnic/multicultural ministry is to design an incarnational ministry philosophy (Zackrison, 1993). He explains this ministry paradigm to be consistent with Jesus earthly ministry; the conversion of a belief system to real life practicality.

The Role of Race in Church

In the previous section regarding potential issues in a multiracial church, different authors presented the need to preserve identity, appreciate differences, create racial inclusiveness, overcome prejudice, and find enrichment through exposure to diversity. In this section I looked at literature that addresses the role of race in the church. The role of positional leaders is identified. Different authors show the influence of both demographics and age

on attitudes toward racial discrimination within the context of church. Various theories are portrayed that explain the reality of racial discrimination in church, including the critical Whiteness theory, individualism and the social identity theory. Finally, racial diversity in the context of a multiracial church is treated with the inclusive identity theory, perspectives on open-mindedness, and racial identity. Table 4 highlights key research findings on race issues and discrimination in church. It shows that several authors report similar findings.

Positional Leaders

Dougherty and Emerson (2018) note the literature identifies leadership as a primary driver of congregational diversity. Positional leaders influence the development and racial integration of a multiracial church. J. J. Lewis (2008) cites Middle Church as an example of the preacher's capacity to foster unity among a racially diverse congregation, explaining that it is the positional leader's responsibility to inspire a vision of God's racially diverse kingdom. Lewis claims positional leaders need to model, preach, teach, and promote acceptance for racial diversity. Foster and Brelsford (1996) provide Cedar Grove Church as an example of a multiracial church with a diverse worship experience where racial diversity is welcomed and the church positional leaders have a permanent commitment to educate the church members and newcomers in how to embrace differences.

Garces-Foley (2011) purports that many people go to church driven by their social needs, including that of acceptance, but suggests that it may take more time for individuals to adapt in a multiracial church and to acquire a sense of belonging. It falls to positional leaders of multiracial churches to intentionally promote a sense of fellowship

Table 4

Race Issues/ Discrimination in Church

	Researchers								
Race issues/ discrimination in church	Blanchard	Dougherty	Dougherty & Huyser	Edwards	Emerson & Smith	Marti	Mather	Tranby & Hartman	Yancy & Kim
Racial prejudice in church relates to racial residential segregation	x	x						x	
Racial discrimination less in younger compared to older evangelicals		x					x		
Critical Whiteness theory used to describe racial discrimination in church				x				x	
Individualism used to justify racial discrimination					x			x	
Social identity downplays racial identity and promotes Whiteness				x					
Inclusive identity theory used to describe the role of race in church			x						
Attitudes of Whites in a multiracial church is more open-minded toward racial diversity									x
Racial identity in church						x			

among the members. Garces-Foley proposes that racially diverse church members are more likely to feel accepted into the church community when racial differences are openly addressed among church members and individual racial values are appreciated.

Despite the need for racial values to be appreciated, racial differences may provoke inherent stereotypical responses. According to Banaji and Greenwald (2016), people have an implicit racial bias. They identify how laughter and facial expressions may give a clue to understand implicit racial bias. For example, in response to a racial joke, an individual may both laugh and be offended. These differing responses by the same individual have meaning. Robert Lynch of Rutgers University explored the question "Can our response to a joke tell us something about ourselves?" (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016, p. 65) by observing the response students had to a comedy video with jokes of racial stereotypes. The object was to determine if both conscious and unconscious biases were tied to laughter. While the comedy video was playing, he took measurements of the students' laughter and facial expressions to the racist humor. Responses were coded for the degree of positive emotions using a standard protocol. The students were also given an implicit association test (Race IAT) to measure their attitudes toward Black and White Americans.

> Lynch looked at whether the two tests were related—specifically, whether those who had stronger IAT-measured automatic White preference were also more likely to show humorous responses when they heard a joke involving a Black stereotype. Indeed, that's what he found…. Like the IAT, what we find funny can inform us about how we feel, because laughter is an automatic, hard-to-fake indicator. (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016, pp. 65-66)

This simple experiment measuring laughter and facial expressions in response to racial humor revealed the profound truth that everyone has implicit bias (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016). In dealing with conflicts in multiracial churches, DeYmaz (2020a)

advises that positional church leaders need to be aware of an individual's feelings and past experiences in order to help them with the issue of generalization or stereotyping. DeYmaz suggests that they should promote open communication about different cultural issues and prejudicial views in order to help church members arrive at honest acceptance and healthy negotiations about their cultural differences through respectful and open dialogue.

Dhingra (2004), studied a Korean church community, revealing the role of the pastor/ positional leader in navigating challenges that arise in the transition to a multiracial congregation:

> While multiculturalism and color blindness appear at odds, for the former draws attention to group differences and the latter suggests ignoring them, they actually fit together in their approach to race. Both suggest that the best way to overcome racial differences is through celebrating groups' cultures equally while ignoring differences in groups' access to privileges. (Dhingra, 2004, p. 376)

Dhingra suggests the pastor is central to balance the issue of attracting the racially different newcomers, while still nurturing the Korean American members. The solution to attract racially diverse newcomers is that the pastors openly promote an environment without Korean distinctness. The church is marketed as multiracial and from the platform the worship services model diverse cultural elements. However behind the scenes the pastors still promote Korean culture in language classes and small groups.

Demographics

Dougherty and Emerson (2018) assert that the literature indicates that demographics is a primary driver of congregational diversity. Community demographic changes impact local churches with racial shifts affecting church membership (Blanchard, 2007; Dougherty, 2003; Hadaway, 1981). Multiracial churches vary

depending on the racial composition of the neighborhood or region of the country (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). Dougherty (2003) states "The proximity of varied racial groups stands as one of the most important conditions for advancing diversity in religious communities" (p. 80).

Blanchard (2007) suggests that residential segregation relates to the high level of racial prejudice among conservative Protestants. Consequently, racial discrimination may result from social isolation within White evangelical churches. According to Blanchard (2007) the "Closed community thesis argues that the strength of the Conservative Protestant institutional base is directly related to the levels of Black-White residential segregation" (p. 429). Emerson and Smith (2001) note a common tendency for White evangelicals to congregate only with their own racial group; "White evangelicalism likely does more to perpetuate the racialized society than to reduce it" (p. 170). Tranby and Hartmann (2008) "Suggest that evangelical individualist culture is more deeply racialized- in its foundations as well as its effects" (p. 342). Mather (2011) adds that this behavior strongly nurtures the state of racial isolation that is currently affecting Christian churches in North America. Thus conservative churches have made a significant contribution to the idea of closed monoracial grouping, thus a powerful channel in the transmission of racial inequality (Blanchard, 2007). This attitude negatively affected the possibility of multiracial exploration in church.

Influence of Age

Dougherty (2003) and Dougherty and Huyser (2008) suggest that new congregations formed by young people are more likely to be racially diverse in contrast to those churches that are older and with aging membership. Mather (2011) also suggests

there may be a change in racial discrimination as he indicates there may be a shift in attitude toward racial diversity emerging with the new generation.

Mather's (2011) research indicates that attitudes toward race and diversity are connected with age, as younger as opposed to older White evangelicals find it meaningful to have friends that are racially different, present a more accepting attitude toward diversity among their friends and associates, and are more likely to show solidarity toward other racial groups. However, Mather acknowledges that both generational groups see the problem of racism and prejudice as an individual situation, not as a collective White problem, and blame the problem of racial inequality in the United States on the racial minority groups.

Dougherty and Emerson (2018) affirm the literature supports younger age to be associated with congregational diversity: "Having younger members, reflecting a cultural shift toward more acceptance for cross-racial relations" (p. 27). DeYmaz (2020b) reflecting 2019 data from the National Congregations Study, as presented by Emerson at the 2019 Mosaix multiethnic church conference stated that having younger members is one of four elements that correlate with multiracial church growth.

Critical Whiteness Theory

Racial discrimination in the church is addressed by Tranby and Hartmann (2008) with the critical Whiteness theory. As described by Doane (1997) and Gregory and Sanjek (1996), the concept of White supremacy was replaced by a subtle form of structural dominance where White is equivalent to American identity both structurally and culturally. According to Doane (1997), Giroux (1992), Lipsitz (1995), and McLaren (1997), the White Anglo-American culture is the point of reference. Thus, Whiteness is

equivalent to normal. According to Roediger (2002), the cultural and national interests of Whites are intermingled, fostering White dominance and influence. According to Frankenberg (2005), Whiteness becomes taken for granted. Doane (1997) and A. E. Lewis (2004) claim that White cultural power both generates and is generated by a culturally concealed White racial identity. Tranby and Hartmann (2008) conclude that as a result, non-Whites are seen as inferior.

To contextualize the critical Whiteness theory discussed by Tranby and Hartman, racial discrimination in the United States is linked to a similar concept called White supremacy. Bonilla-Silva (2001), Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2013), Omi and Winant (1994), and Wellman (1994) are critical race theorists that contend White supremacy impacts the United States. As central to White supremacy, these race theorists identify Whiteness to be White racial identity. According to Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2013), Frankenberg (2005), and A. E. Lewis (2004) there are three aspects of Whiteness: White structural advantage, White normativity, and White transparency. As described by Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2013) and Flagg (1993), White structural advantage means Whites have predominant influence and control of social structure and organizations, thus influencing to have the best advantages. Edwards (2008) states that White normativity simply means the beliefs and practices of Whites are seen to be normal with no explanation required. White transparency is where Whites are blinded to the reality that they too are a distinctive culture with unique practices and customs that impact their lives (Waters, 2009).

According to Tranby and Hartmann (2008):

> American individualism not only blinds White evangelicals to structural inequalities involving race, but it also assigns blame to those who are disadvantaged by race and

> normalizes and naturalizes cultural practices, beliefs, and norms that privilege White Americans over others. Individualist cultural norms and ideals, then, are not paradoxical to racial inequality, as Emerson and Smith suggest; instead, they may preclude the very structural reforms they believe to be necessary for meaningful change. (p. 354)

The critical Whiteness theory can also be understood with the homophily principle. Blau and Schwartz (1997) describe the homophily principle to be similar people preferentially seeking each other. Some researchers attempt to explain multiracial congregations using the homophily principle. Edwards (2008) explains how this relates to church membership, stating that both the number of racially similar members and the social status of church members may both be elements of this principle. He observed that Whites left churches when feeling their superiority threatened in either aspect. Edwards (2008) states:

> I discuss the importance of understanding the role that race, as a system that advantages Whites, plays in the congregational life of racially integrated churches. Drawing upon the critical race literature, I propose that because race is central to how our society is organized, interracial churches will need to placate White members' and affirm their religiocultural preferences and interests in order to sustain racially diverse congregations. (p. 5)

In the context of the critical Whiteness theory, racial discrimination in the United States is also linked to the social identity theory. Some researchers attempt to explain multiracial congregations using the social identity theory, however Edwards (2008) believes this is insufficient to explain the role of race, specifically that of Whites. Prentice and Miller (2001) reported the social identity theory by describing recategorization. They describe recategorization as the most common manifestation of the social identity theory in religious organizations, as a unifying religious identity promoted in the congregation. Becker (1998), Marti (2005), and Stanczak (2006) explain that this religious social identity is promoted while racial differences are downplayed.

Edwards (2008) feels this perspective is inadequate and flawed. He suggests recategorization does not acknowledge the reality of the racial hierarchy that influences the social and economic lives of all. Edwards claims that this unifying religious identity undermines the real-life reality for minorities of the racialized society and religion; that this social identity, by diminishing the impact of race, actually promotes Whiteness.

Edwards (2008) case study of an African-American/White interracial church suggests that African-American/White interracial churches may show significant cultural and structural characteristics of White churches with minimal African-American influence. Edwards (2008) research relates to the critical Whiteness theory: "Indeed, religion, particularly Christianity is arguably the most racially segregated institution in the United States" (Edwards, 2008, pp. 5-6).

Dhingra (2004) concludes:

> While multiculturalism and color blindness appear at odds, for the former draws attention to group differences and the latter suggests ignoring them, they actually fit together in their approach to race. Both suggest that the best way to overcome racial differences is through celebrating groups' cultures equally while ignoring differences in groups' access to privileges. (p. 376)

Dhingra (2004) provides a possible solution to the racial discrimination inherent according to the critical Whiteness theory. In attempt to form a multiracial church, this blending of multiculturalism with color blindness could be plausible.

Inclusive Identity Theory

Dougherty and Huyser (2008) contribute to the understanding of racial diversity in multiracial churches using the inclusive identity theory. There are different key internal factors in integrating racial diversity in church services. According to Dougherty and Huyser (2008):

> Overcoming embedded customs of social distance requires a purposeful effort on the part of any formal organization in a racialized society. Institutionalized discrimination prevails through the status quo operation of social institutions and social organizations. This is especially true for voluntary organizations where the frequency and intimacy of relations are even more reflective of societal patterns of social distance. Racially diverse congregations do not develop automatically, even in the most culturally mixed and integrated communities. Integrating disparate cultural groups require a shift in core values and worldview. It requires cultivating a shared, collective identity that transcends participants' personal ethnic identities. (p. 26)

This would suggest that a multiracial church does not form without intentional effort: a shift from the prevailing mentality of socially accepted racial discrimination, with a choice instead to cultivate an inclusive identity. Inclusive identity speaks about the necessity of collective identity of the multiracial church (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). The inclusive identity theory can explain racial diversity and racial inclusion within churches. Dougherty and Huyser categorize aspects of congregational diversity into three areas: programming and leadership, worship, and relational connection.

Inclusive identity theory addresses the importance of programing and leadership in order to accommodate differences in a multiracial church (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). Programming, as an essential part of a healthy multiracial congregation should be racially inclusive, giving the opportunity to openly speak about issues and possible barriers that potentially split churches into racial clusters. The role of a positional leader in the development of a multiracial congregation was emphasized, with a pastor or priest from a racial group different from the majority of the attendees suggested.

Inclusive identity theory addresses worship services as another important part of a multiracial church (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). This can include worship style, with the charismatic style apparent in the integration of multiracial worship in religious congregations. Specifically, Warner (1997) points out the role of music in worship

because it can stick in the mind of the worshiper, it appeals to the emotions, it is a universal language, and can both impact the corporate church body as well as the individual.

Inclusive identity theory emphasizes the formation of relational connections among church members in a multiracial church (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). The promotion and cultivation of significant strong relationships among the members of the congregation helps them to overcome misunderstandings that emerge within the church due to racial differences. The more connected the church members become to each other, the harder they will work to understand each other.

Diversity and Open-Mindedness

Yancey and Kim (2008) compare elements of diversity from multiracial to monoracial congregations. Socioeconomic diversity was more likely in in the former. Liberal churches were more accommodating of gender equality than conservative churches irrespective of racial diversity. According to Collins (2000), Freeman (1995), Levine-Rasky (2002), and Vannoy (2001), the overlap of racial, gender, and class hierarchies may have a snowball effect on each other. However, Yancey and Kim (2008) suggest there is a lack of research to show whether lessening one hierarchy would mitigate the others. According to Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson (2005), DeYoung et al. (2004), Emerson (2006), and Marti (2005), multiracial congregations are typically very intentional to be inclusive in the different areas of church life and function to generate racial diversity: being led by positional leaders from different racial backgrounds, having worship representing the different cultures within the church, and taking seriously the idea of integrating racial diversity. According to research performed

by Emerson (2006) and Yancey (1999), the attitude of Whites that are part of a multiracial church is more open-minded toward racial diversity than the attitude of Whites that belong to a predominantly White church. However, Yancey (1999) indicates that there is not a significant difference in the attitude of non-Whites that are part of a multiracial church toward racially diversity compared to non-Whites that are part of a monoracial church.

Racial Identity

According to Rock (2018), racial identity and ethnic solidarity go together:

> Ethnic solidarity, the companion reality to racial identity, is a prominent reason for Black America's reluctance to melt into majority America. As with all minority people groups, the cultural conditioning of their community (the instilling of folkways and mores) is so deeply ingrained that while not indissoluble, it is for all practical purposes not eradicable. The result is that its members not only interpret life through the lens of their ethnic reality, but they usually find their greatest comfort and assurance in the company of those of like culture. (p. 172)

Racial identity/ethnic solidarity influence the members' interactions in a multiracial church. Marti (2009) performed an ethnographic case study following the ethnic identity theory on two multiracial congregations to identify how an individual adapts to but yet conserves their racial identity when incorporating into a multiracial congregation. Becoming part of a multiracial church is subjective. There are three aspects, "moments," in the religious experience of integration and development of spiritual ties among racially diverse members: "affinity with the congregation, identity reorientation, and ethnic transcendence" (Marti, 2009, p. 57). Affinity with the congregation means common interests among individuals that attract them together, an individual initially comes to a multiracial church based on an affinity. Identity reorientation identifies the process of individuals moving from defining their identity by

external factors toward defining their identity by congregational characteristics such as its shared ideals and philosophies. Ethnic transcendence is a shared religious identity superseding individual racial differences and thus facilitating positive social interaction.

According to Marti (2009):

> Multiracial churches access a textured, multifaceted identity found among people in highly urbanized contexts, and members discover places within the congregation to express personal values and desires. As individuals become more deeply involved in the congregation, they selectively accentuate and/or obscure their ethnic and racial affiliations. Congregational activities and structures in diverse congregations urge members to take on collective identities, and members of these congregations co-construct a new-shared identity, especially through rituals and shared practices. (p. 63)

Marti (2009) emphasizes that integration is different from assimilation, meaning that individuals can become very active members of a racially diverse congregation without losing their own racial identity. When members of a multiracial church take ownership of their congregation, developing a sense of belonging, race and religion is being integrated in the individual's life. As articulated by Pollard (2009), the gospel creates a primary identity that overcomes racial divisions:

> God's final salvation will encompass representatives from "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people" (Revelation 7:9). Racism—the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over another, based on pigmentation—originates from our fallenness. Human nature produces attitudes and behaviors that contradict the manifest will of God (see Romans 7:18-20). Racism is grounded in our unredeemed personal and political self-interest. But God's grace, through the gospel, can and will cleanse His modern children from racism (1 Corinthians 15:57) as surely as it did people in New Testament times (see Acts 10:34; Ephesians 2:14-16). (p. 13)

Pollard (2000) describes this gospel centered "primary identity" as a "Christocentric life:"

> Assumes fallenness of my group, clan, tribe, race.
> Is maintained by a magnetic attraction to the Christ of the Gospels.
> Defines itself by cooperation with Christ.
> Celebrates self-expenditure on behalf of others.

Results in a radically new way of viewing and serving others. (pp. 17-19)

Furthermore, Pollard (2000) references the ministry of apostle Paul to articulate how the gospel centered "primary identity" could address the challenge of racial identity in multiracial ministry:

> Paul labored with great success cross-culturally only and precisely because he was free. His freedom grew out of his encounter with Jesus Christ (see Gal.1:1). Paul was free from the old "identity anchors" that he once embraced. His identity became grounded in a new experience: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus he could no longer be Judeocentric. This is why he says, "I became as a Jew." Paul no longer considers himself a Jew in terms of primary values commitments, and allegiance. (p. 18)

Thus according to Pollard (2000), Paul found his identity in Christ because the gospel created a new "primary identity" (p. 19). Nonetheless, in a multiracial church, transcending race does not ignore the differences between the racially different (Marti, 2009). While celebrating the differences between races, a connection through church, religious beliefs, and spiritual goals becomes important for each racial group. With a new "primary identity" (Pollard, 2000, p. 19), the connection between the racially different members of a congregation is based on the gospel they share rather than on their personal racial background.

Trends in Multiracial Churches

Dougherty and Emerson (2018) have been following multiracial congregations in the U.S. since 1998. Utilizing data from the National Congregations Study (1998, 2006, 2012) to analyze changes in multiracial congregations, they drew four main conclusions:

> First, there appears to be a growing demand for religious spaces that span racial and ethnic boundaries… Second, some congregations are better able to meet the demand for diversity than others… Third… American congregations may be growing in diversity without altering the social conditions that inhibit full racial integration…

> Finally, our study reveals the need for continues improvements in congregational data collection.

In the forefront of the Multiethnic Church Movement, DeYmaz (2020b) highlights statistics from the next phase of this longitudinal research, that added 2019 data from the National Congregations Study, as presented by Emerson at the 2019 Mosaix multiethnic church conference. Emerson reported an increase from 6% in 1998 to 16% in 2019 of multiracial/multiethnic congregations across all faiths. Within Christendom there were three categories reported: Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Evangelical. There was an increase in racial diversity in Catholic Congregations from 17% (2006) to 24% (2019); in Mainline Protestant from 1% (2006) to 11% (2019); in Evangelical Churches from 7% (1998) to 23% (2019). Emerson commented:

> The growing proportion of evangelical multiracial churches, I think, is the big story… It's more than tripled in these twenty years. By the way, as a sociologist who studies these things and watches how social change happens there's no way ever I could have imagined that would be possible; so it's the work of God. (DeYmaz, 2020b)

Emerson also reported racial diversity in leadership of the multiracial churches, with the head pastor being: Asian 3% (1998) to 4% (2019); Hispanic 3% (1998) to 7% (2019); Black (4%) 1998 to 18% (2019); White 87% (1998) to 70% (2019). The race/ethnicity of congregants of multiracial churches: Asian 6% (1998) to 8% (2019); White 50% (1998) to 49% (2019); Hispanic 16% (2006) to 17% (2019); Black 16% (1998) to 21% (2019). Emerson identified four elements from the latest research that correlate with multiracial church growth: being evangelical or Catholic, expressive worship, having younger members, and being located in Western U.S. Addressing the multiracial/multiethnic church movement, Emerson challenged in the context of this

increased diversity to aim for "true justice, true reconciliation, and true unity, addressing major issues like white privilege" (DeYmaz, 2020b).

Summary of Literature

Church growth literature is a recent phenomenon although it originates with Scripture as a fulfillment of the Gospel commission Jesus gave in Matthew 28. While statistical analysis of membership is used to quantify church growth, the reality of how churches grow is much more complex. Numerous authors developed models and enumerated church growth principles in an attempt to understand its complexity. In these models and principles, the concept of homogeneity, the role of leadership, and potential cultural barriers are specifically relevant to this dissertation.

Barriers to diversity in church are seen by church growth authors as often cultural in nature. They are amplified by a history of social and racial isolation, although the growing demographic diversification of society is also impacting churches. Multiracial churches are becoming more common. A multiracial church is defined by the 80/20 criterium, a principle established and generally accepted in the literature. Although the terms multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic are all utilized in the literature, I chose to utilize the term *multiracial* in this dissertation based on what I perceive to be the strongest relevant argument: race is the key issue. Scripture promotes racial inclusion and the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is supportive of multiracial congregations. Positional leaders, whether ordained or lay persons, play an important role in developing a multiracial church and addressing unique issues that arise, such as the reality of racial discrimination. There are various theories to both help understand the problem and guide

the process of overcoming racial discrimination in church and making a truly multiracial church a reality.

The path to this reality is a complex one. As the contextual diversity of society is impacting the church, multiracial churches are emerging. Within the context of this new reality, an understanding of the various dynamics related to church growth and the development of multiracial churches together provide the framework that guided this dissertation that focused on the influence of racial diversity on the growth of a multiracial congregation in the suburbs of Buffalo, New York.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study was to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC) in Lancaster, New York, a multiracial congregation. This chapter describes the research design and the methodology of this study, including considerations about my involvement in the study as the pastor of the congregation (self as the research instrument), the data collection procedures, the strategies for validating findings, the process of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

The Congregation

In selecting BSSDAC for this case study I first confirmed that statistically it was a growing multiracial church. This involves two issues: (1) its growth rate, and (2) its multiracial character. The data clearly indicated that BSSDAC qualifies on both counts. As shown in chapter 1, BSSDAC qualifies as a growing church based on its average annual growth rate (AAGR) of 7.64%, a growth rate designated as *good* growth by church growth experts (Towns, 1995; Wagner, 1979; Zackrison, 1997).

Furthermore, BSSDAC also qualifies as a multiracial church following the 80/20 criterium that says that a single race cannot comprise more than 80% of the congregation. Thus, if there is a minority race represented by at least 20% of the membership, it is

enough in order to qualify a church as multiracial (DeYmaz & Li, 2010; Dougherty, 2003; Emerson, 2006; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Schwadel & Dougherty, 2010). BSSDAC, following the racial categories listed by the U.S Census Bureau, meets the 80/20 criterium as a multiracial church. According to BSSDAC membership, as recorded in the online data system, eAdventist, the 2019 year-end membership totaled 575. Members were identified within racial categories (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017c) and Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017d) with the assistance of several long-tenure church members. The 2019 membership of 575 is comprised of 222 White, 154 Black/African American, 128 Asian, 9 Two or More Races, 32 Other racial categorization, and 30 Hispanic.

Research Questions

I focused on two elements in this research: church growth and racial diversity. This study was guided by a central research question that led to three more detailed sub-questions. The central question guiding this study is:

In what ways has racial diversity influenced the growth of Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC), Lancaster, New York?

The sub-questions of this study are:

1. How did BSSDAC become a racially mixed congregation?

2. What are the perceived elements (principles, factors) that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation from the perspective of church leaders and members?

3. How has the emerging racial diversity of BSSDAC contributed or hindered the growth of the church from the perspective of church leaders and members?

Question two was intended to elicit general elements contributing to growth as a multiracial congregation, whereas question three was intended to specifically elicit perceptions on how racial diversity may have influenced church growth.

Research Design

In order to answer the research questions, I chose a qualitative research methodology. I conducted an instrumental case study to develop a detailed description of a multiracial church in Lancaster, NY: Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As suggested in the literature review, traditional church growth experts advise a monoracial structure as best suited for church growth. More recently, literature on multiracial churches emphasizes their need and emergence. However, there is not much discussion on the influence of racial diversity on church growth. Thus, as the pastor of a multiracial church that is experiencing growth, I wondered if and how racial diversity and church growth are related in this particular case. The case study method allowed me to systematically explore the perceptions of members and local leaders about potential implications of racial diversity for church growth.

Case Study

Yin (2014) describes case study methodology as doing research on a selected case from an actual current situation. It is particularly useful when a researcher wants to explore an issue, situation or phenomenon in depth in its real-life context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2014). This investigation can be done in different ways. Creswell (2013) using Stake's typology of case studies identifies three types of case studies: instrumental, collective, and intrinsic. In an *instrumental* case study an

issue is explored on the basis of one selected case to gain a broader understanding of the phenomenon (Stake, 2010). In a *collective* case study the chosen issue is also explored, but within the context of multiple cases (Creswell, 2013). The *intrinsic* cases study is focused on describing a unique case, like a program evaluation (Stake, 2010). I selected the instrumental case study approach to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in a multiracial church in Lancaster, New York: Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church. The instrumental case study approach was best suited to my research as I sought a broader understanding of a specific issue within a specific case.

Self as the Instrument

Since I serve as the pastor of the congregation that was studied as well as the principal researcher in this case study, I am aware that I utilized "self as an instrument" (Eisner, 2017, p. 33). Being so close to the case that was studied allowed me to closely observe and discern behaviors and infer their importance. I was careful to give evidence for my observations and interpretation. I had to find ways to determine what was meaningful and make judgments to disregard the trivial or irrelevant (Eisner, 2017, p. 34). Eisner (2017) describes "the self as an instrument" (p. 33) as an important feature of qualitative research: "Self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it" (p. 34). Each researcher brings his own experience and background into the research situation and is therefore unique:

> Each person's history, and hence world, is unlike anyone else's. This means that the way in which we see and respond to a situation, and how we interpret what we see, will bear our own signature. This unique signature is not a liability but a way of providing individual insight into a situation. (p. 34)

Eisner (2017) explains that *self as an instrument* utilized in qualitative research is supported by educational criticism which acknowledges that the situations observed and suppositions inferred will differ. Researchers must be careful to

> provide evidence and reasons. But they reject the assumption that unique interpretation is a conceptual liability in understanding, and they see the insights secured from multiple views as more attractive than the comforts provided by a belief in a single right one. (Eisner, 2017, p. 35)

In this qualitative research study where I am the researcher and thus utilizing "self as an instrument" (Eisner, 2017, p. 33), I recognize the challenge of determining what is significant. I acknowledge that my perspective and interpretations are shaped by my own story and background. Therefore I need to clearly show my process and thinking. In my research I am the pastor of the church selected for the case study and at the same time the researcher utilizing *self as an instrument.*

In the limitations section in chapter one I acknowledged that my personal background and experience would influence my perspectives and interpretations of the situation. I realize that my own biases can influence the way I view the data and draw conclusions. For this reason I strove to be transparent with my process and engaged in several steps to control potential bias which I will explain here in some detail.

First, I acknowledge my personal long-term interest in the topic of racial diversity and church growth. Through my 25 years of pastoral ministry, I experienced multiple congregations where people of different races came together. I also observed that racial diversity seemed to be a factor attracting people to these churches. This study allowed me to check my perceptions and compare them with those who experienced the history of BSSDAC. Second, I recognize that I am the pastor of the church in the study. As such I was involved in the day-to-day life of the congregation. Over the years I built deep

relationships with many members and leaders who make up this congregation. While I was vitally interested in the connection between the multiracial realities of the church and its growth, I was open to learn and be corrected in my hunches and potential biases. Third, the church kept excellent records of its membership, which allowed me to utilize official data provided by written church records. Fourth, I asked long-tenure church members to be the ones to assign the members within racial categories (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017c) and Hispanic origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017d). This demographic analysis concerning the racial makeup of the membership led to the determination that the church is multiracial. Fifth, during the focus groups I conducted I was careful to take on a listening posture. Then I analyzed the data to identify church growth principles and the participants' perspectives on the influence of racial diversity on church growth.

Participant Observation

Unlike self as the instrument (Eisner, 2017) which can be seen as a limitation in qualitative research, I could also identify myself as a participant observer (Creswell, 2013) which can be seen as an added dimension to qualitative research. According to Creswell (2013), "The participant role is more salient than the researcher role. This may help the researcher gain inside views and subjective data" (pp. 166-167). The researcher functions as a participant, utilizing knowledge gleaned from interaction with the research subjects to gain further access to the participant group. Creswell points out that participant observation contributes a dimension of information that is absent in survey data. As the pastor of BSSDAC and simultaneously the principle researcher in this study, I identify as a participant observer. As church pastor, my interaction with church leaders and members goes much deeper than the limited amount of time spent in focus group

discussions. I am personally involved in the lives of these people. This added knowledge aided me in selecting focus group participants and obtaining a dimension of information that helped me in processing and synthesizing the focus group discussions.

Purposeful Sample

It was this unique relationship with BSSDAC which led to the selection of the church for the case study. I utilized a purposeful sample in selection of individuals to participate in the focus groups. According to Creswell (2013) "Three considerations go into the purposeful sampling approach in qualitative research: the decision as to whom to select as participants (or sites) for the study, the specific type of sampling strategy, and the size of the sample" (pp. 154-155).

The site chosen for this case study was BSSDAC. I selected BSSDAC in 2017 after having become the church pastor in 2015. There were several reasons for selection. The primary reason being that it is a multiracial church. The second reason was its proximity and accessibility to me. Third, as the church pastor, I already built a professional relationship with church leaders and members that would facilitate data collection. Also, as an employee of New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists I had a professional connection with the administrative conference leadership level from whom permission for participation was needed to do the case study of BSSDAC. I obtained a letter granting permission to study BSSDAC from the New York Conference president (See Appendix F).

Purposeful sampling was also utilized to select the individuals for focus group participants, and documents for review. According to Creswell (2013) purposeful sampling involves the selection of individuals because they "can purposefully inform an

understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study" (p. 156). According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) qualitative research is usually not trying to obtain generalizable results but rather to explain and describe. In this study I tried to understand and explain the implications between the multiracial membership and the growth of the church over the last 12 years. To do so I selected members that experienced that growth as insiders and that could help me understand the different dynamics at work. I intentionally selected several long-tenure church members for the focus groups to better understand the church history and current church dynamic. These individuals were selected based on membership duration and active church involvement.

As I decided on how many persons to include in the focus groups, the advice of Marshall (1996) helped: "An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question" (p. 523). For focus groups, 16 church members and leaders were selected and divided into two focus groups. Selection of focus group size was guided by the *Focus Group Research Handbook*, which recommends having between eight to 10 participants in a focus group (Edmunds, 2001).

It is relevant to note here that with BSSDAC selected as the multiracial church for this case study, it creates vulnerability for the focus group participants as race and racial discrimination are controversial topics. According to Yin (2014), when a study involves a controversial element, anonymity provides protection for the individual participants. Thus individuals selected for focus groups remained confidential in this study due to the sensitive nature of race with the reality of racial discrimination. For this reason no demographic information, leadership roles, or titles were provided which could jeopardize confidentiality.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was done in two stages. Document analysis was performed to establish BSSDAC as a growing multiracial church. Church membership records were analyzed to determine the historical and current growth rates of BSSDAC and identify the racial categories of the church membership. Informal data collection was performed in my function as church pastor through visiting members and inadvertently getting to know their perceptions.

Subsequently I collected data through focus groups of local church leaders and members. Two focus groups were conducted with eight participants in each group. The focus group meetings were audio recorded and then professionally transcribed.

Documents

This case study analyzed a 12-year period of BSSDAC that included the time of transition from a monoracial to a multiracial church from 2008-2019. I calculated the growth rate of this transition period. I obtained BSSDAC membership records in the online data system, eAdventist, for 2007 through 2019, from the New York Conference Secretary. I obtained 2019 average attendance figures from the BSSDAC clerk. Categorization by race was done for both church members and attendees. I had church leaders and members examine the membership list with me and identify the racial category for each member. The same categories as utilized by the U.S. Census Bureau were followed in categorizing racial diversity of church members in this research: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017c). A person may fall into more than one racial category. This group is categorized as: Two or More Races. The category

Other represents the members on the church records that are not currently attending and were unable to be identified as to racial category. Although "Hispanic" is not one of the five racial categories, it is an identification of origin utilized in conjunction with racial categorization (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017d). Those that were identified as Hispanic were not identified in one of the five racial categories.

Focus Groups

In respect for the time of church leaders and members participating in the research, my data collection was done mainly through focus groups. According to Creswell (2013) "Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information … and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information" (p. 164).

The focus groups were conducted following Creswell's (2013) interviewing approach and following a protocol. I moderated each focus group in a quiet room. Each focus group conversation was audio recorded after securing written consent from all the participants. The focus group contents were professionally transcribed using Rev.com. The discussion was framed with a set of questions, while participants were still free to share and express openly. The first focus group lasted one hour. The second focus group lasted one and one-half hours. Each focus group was conducted in BSSDAC's library with participants sitting around a table.

Focus Group Participants

I selected individuals for the focus groups based on active church involvement or a leadership role. Active church involvement meant attending and participating in

worship services and church functions regularly. Leadership role meant holding a church office and performing this function within the local church, such as elder, deacon, treasurer, etc. I selected participants with different durations of church membership, different ages, genders, and race. I invited church members verbally to participate in the focus groups. I used a script for participant recruitment:

> For my dissertation through Andrews University I am conducting a case study to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-Day Adventist Church. I will be holding focus groups with church leaders and church members here at Buffalo Suburban. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group? (Appendix C)

Not everyone asked was available. Sixteen individuals agreed to participate and were placed in two focus groups of eight each. Group assignments were influenced by when individuals were available to meet.

Each focus group participant is referenced in the study with a pseudonym. The pseudonyms use the word "Participant" followed by a number then a letter. The number identifies them as one of the eight participants in a focus group. The subsequent letter identifies the focus group they were in. The focus groups are identified as focus group A and focus group B. For example, focus group participants are identified as Participant 1a and Participant 1b to correlate with focus groups A and B.

In the focus group transcription, the professional transcriptionist identified my voice as participant 1 in each group. Also, in focus group A one of the participants voices is identified by two different numbers, as there is a total of 10 voices numbered in the transcription. I was unable to determine which one of the voices was labeled by two different participant numbers in the transcription. Thus, although each focus group

contained only eight participants, the transcription of Focus group A identifies participants 1-10 and Focus group B identifies participants 1-9.

Focus Group Procedure

Focus group A was conducted first, and focus group B was conducted second. Focus groups were held one day apart. Prior to conducting each focus group, all focus group participants were provided with the Consent Form (see Appendix D) to review and sign before beginning the interview. Participants were allowed time for questions. No one had questions. All participants were aware that the focus group would be audio recorded, and agreed to this. Everyone signed the Consent Form.

In the focus groups I asked questions regarding racial diversity, church growth, and the potential implications of racial diversity for church growth. Focus group questions (see appendix A) intended to find how BSSDAC became a racially mixed congregation, the perceived elements that contributed to its growth as a multiracial congregation, and how the racial diversity contributed or hindered its growth.

The following questions were asked regarding racial diversity: Tell me about the racial diversity of BSSDAC? What do you think has contributed to the current racial composition/diversity of BSSDAC? Tell me about the change in racial diversity in BSSDAC over the last ten years? Tell me about how BSSDAC involves members of different racial groups in its leadership, its ministries, and in the life of the church? What impact do you think racial diversity has on BSSDAC?

The following questions were asked regarding church growth: Tell me about church growth in BSSDAC over the last ten years? Tell me about what you think has

contributed to church growth in BSSDAC over the last ten years? What do you think are the kinds of church growth that BSSDAC is experiencing now?

The following questions were asked regarding ways in which racial diversity contributed or hindered its growth: Describe what relationship (if any) you see between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC? Describe the influence (if any) of racial diversity on church growth?

To further explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth, I asked: What metaphor(s) could capture the essence (if any) of the influence/relationship between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC? The intent of a metaphor was to obtain a broader description of the potential implications. I then asked: Can you give an incident, story, description, or compelling experience that illustrates the relationship between racial diversity and church growth of BSSDAC?

Strategies for Validating Findings

There are various validation strategies. Creswell (2013) utilizes "the term validation to emphasize a process rather than verification (which has quantitative overtones) or historical words such as trustworthiness and authenticity" (p. 250). He describes eight accepted validation strategies, to "document the 'accuracy'" (p. 250), suggesting a researcher should employ at least two of them in a particular qualitative research study. The eight validation strategies are: "prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, rich thick description, external audits" (Creswell, 2013, pp. 250-252). I selected two strategies to validate my study: clarifying researcher bias and member checking.

I used clarification of researcher bias as a validation strategy. According to Creswell (2013) validation through clarification of researcher bias means that at the beginning of the study the researcher notes their "past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations" that influenced and formed the researcher's perspective, approach to and conclusions from the research (p. 251). In my case study of this multiracial congregation, I utilized clarification of researcher bias by including in my introduction to the case study, my personal background and perspectives. I identified myself as the church pastor and researcher. In order to control bias, I was transparent with my thought process and interpretations.

I used member checking as another validation strategy. A researcher validates the collected data by reporting the preliminary data analysis back to the participants of the research to have them evaluate their accuracy (Creswell, 2013). The participants have opportunity to provide their perspective as to if the conclusions are correct or what may be missing from the research report. I performed member checking by asking the focus group participants to review my preliminary findings and write up of the case study. This was done once I conducted the focus groups and data review of church records. I provided the write up from the focus group discussions back to 15 of the 16 focus group participants (one had died). I emailed the document to the participants and asked that they review it and provide feedback including any observations or comments. Several participants told me verbally they reviewed the document and were pleased with its content. Written feedback from six participants included: "This represents a lot of time and effort! I appreciated reading through and was quite impressed with the content and format." "I am reading the write up and will get back to you if I have any questions or

concerns." "Thank you for the review of your study." "I think it reflects the discussion well." "I found it to be very interesting to see it all pulled together." "I found this to be very interesting and comprehensive."

Other than a handful of grammatical errors noted within the quotations of participants, only two specific comments were provided by one focus group participant. In the preliminary write-up provided for review by the focus group participants, the membership figures were listed for each racial category, but the average attendance was not provided for comparison. One participant noted the membership reflected a large percentage of White members, but commented "if you were to note the racial composition of those in attendance on any given Sabbath, you would find much less Whites and much more diversity." This observation reflects the reality depicted in Figure 3 which shows the 2019 membership and attendance concurrently. Although the membership lists 222 White, only 55 White attend on average weekly. Whites comprise about 19% of weekly average attendance.

This participant also noted "a diverse leadership within the church seemed to lag. I think our leadership is more diverse now, but it took a while for that to happen." This comment affirmed the process of change toward inclusivity and acceptance of diversity in leadership that occurred in BSSDAC through the process of becoming a multiracial congregation.

Data Analysis

In the case study approach the data is analyzed through describing the case and identifying themes (Creswell, 2013). It results in an extensive comprehensive and "thick" description of the particular case chosen for the study. The transcription of the

focus group conversations were compiled and entered into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Data analysis was performed using NVivo to identify key words, phrases, and themes. From the results of data analysis and themes identified using NVivo, I created a description of BSSDAC. I described the church, its growth, and the dynamic of racial diversity as perceived by church leaders and members. These themes enabled me to explore the perceived influence of racial diversity on church growth in BSSDAC and to answer the research questions.

Institutional Review Board

This study was conducted in accordance with Andrews University IRB policies and standards. The first step was to submit an IRB application for approval of human subjects research. This was followed by submission of a Recruitment Script (See Appendix C); Consent Form (See Appendix D), and Institutional Consent Letters (See Appendix F). Additional documents provided were a certificate of completion of the Protecting Human Research Participants NIH web training and the research protocol. I received AU IRB approval upon submission of all required documents (See Appendix E).

Data Reporting

Written research can be described as touring a house by looking into different rooms, or by analyzing a statue from different angles (Creswell, 2013). I incorporated what Creswell (2013) terms dimensions of the research report: reflexivity and representation, audience, encoding, and quotes as I attempted to provide a "tour" of a select multiracial congregation: BSSDAC.

Reflexivity is where the author shows what their position is to the work presented (Creswell, 2013). I started by stating my personal background as the church pastor, thus revealing my personal perspective. I included my racial background, as it is relevant to the study topic, thus revealing my point of view in the research discovery and interpretation. By divulging about myself to the reader, my research will thus be interpretable within this framework.

A researcher should write the research report with the potential audience in mind (Creswell, 2013). I assumed an audience of Christian church pastors and church administrators that may include individuals who are either familiar or unfamiliar with multiracial churches. I was careful to define the terminology used, keeping the report to a moderate length, attempting to be plain and simple and not incorporate terminology that is too sophisticated. According to Creswell (2013), "The words we use encode our report, revealing how we perceive the needs of our audiences" (p. 217). Because I was writing for a specific audience, I selected terms adapted to a Christian leader's vocabulary.

Creswell (2013) describes three types of quotes, which are identified as: eye-catching quotations, embedded quotes, and longer quotes. I used the eye-catching quotes that according to Creswell are short but significant passages, to provide short breaks in the report. I also employed embedded quotes, which just flow into the author's sentence structure to accentuate a point or to shut down an area of discussion. Embedded quotes helped me report the interview responses. I used longer quotes when needed to provide depth.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2013), there are many potential ethical issues that may arise in research. Following the IRB protocol I addressed ethical considerations in preparing for the study and collecting data to include: site selection, participant recruitment, and informed consent. Ethical considerations within data analysis and reporting included protecting the potentially vulnerable and appropriately applying the results. Creswell (2013) states: "A researcher protects the anonymity of the informants, for example, by assigning numbers or aliases to individuals" (p. 174). Accordingly, each focus group participant is referenced in the study with a pseudonym. The pseudonyms use the word "Participant" followed by a number then a letter. The number identifies them as one of the eight participants in each focus group. The subsequent letter references the focus group they were in. The focus groups are identified as focus group A and focus group B and focus group participants are identified as Participant 1a and Participant 1b to correlate with focus groups A and B.

In reporting the data, the main ethical dilemma was to avoid simply generalizing the results. This research was a case study; thus, it is limited to one specific congregation. It not only represented just one denomination, but also just one congregation. Thus, it would be unethical to generalize the findings to all multiracial churches. However Creswell (2013) concludes within case study representation, "the researcher develops *naturalistic generalizations* from analyzing the data, generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases" (p. 200). Thus it is hoped that the selected case (BSSDAC) might mirror a larger reality.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in a multiracial church. I selected the case study approach for my research to develop a detailed description of the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lancaster, New York. Data collection included a review of historical church documents and church membership records along with interviews of focus groups of church leaders and members. Themes were identified, selected, developed, and analyzed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Results from data analysis were used to describe the dynamics of the church. The results are reported in Chapters IV and V.

CHAPTER IV

BECOMING A MULTIRACIAL CHURCH

Introduction

The central question which guided this research was: In what ways has racial diversity influenced the growth of Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC), Lancaster, New York? In order to answer this central question, I developed three sub-questions which correspond to the main sections of this chapter.

Since BSSDAC did not start out as a racially mixed congregation, a more basic question emerged: How did BSSDAC become a racially mixed congregation? I answered this first research sub-question in the first section of this chapter. This section was based on an analysis of existing records at the church and on membership data as recorded in the online data system, eAdventist, for 2007 through 2019 obtained from the secretary of the New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

In the second section, I turned my attention to the second sub-question that guided the study: What are the perceived elements (principles, factors) that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation from the perspective of church leaders and members? This section was based on participant's comments from the focus group discussions. I reported four major themes tied to church growth that emerged from my

analysis of the transcription of the focus group conversation with local church leaders and members.

In the third section, I answered the third sub-question: How has the emerging racial diversity of BSSDAC contributed or hindered the growth of the church from the perspective of church leaders and members? This section was also based on participant's comments from focus group discussions. I reported two themes that emerged.

How BSSDAC Became Racially Diverse

The First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Buffalo was organized as an official church in November of 1885 (Barczak, 1968). In 1982 the church moved to its current location in Lancaster, NY, (Young, 1983) where it also acquired its current name: Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC). Long-tenure members remember that before the 1980s BSSDAC traditionally was predominantly White. In the 1980s a few Black members joined, but it was during the last 12 years that BSSDAC became a truly multiracial church.

Emerging Diversity in the Community

According to the Office of Archives Statistics and Research (2019) there are six other Seventh-day Adventist churches within 26 miles of Lancaster, NY where BSSDAC is located. Three of these congregations are predominantly White churches and also part of the New York Conference. The other three churches are part of the Northeastern Conference, which is a Regional Conference. Of these three, two are predominantly Black and one Hispanic.

Although the original church plant was in the city of Buffalo, it is now located in the village of Lancaster, which is considered a suburb of the city of Buffalo. Members of

BSSDAC come from a wide circumference around the church, including Buffalo City, Lancaster Village, and many of the other suburbs of Buffalo and surrounding communities. The racial composition of the immediate surroundings in Lancaster Village for 2013-2017 according to American Community Survey estimates is 96.9% White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b). However the diversity of Buffalo City is much greater with 47.6% White, 37.1% Black, and 5.2% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a). As shown in greater detail in Table 5, the increase in racial diversity between 2000 and 2017 was much greater in Buffalo City than in Lancaster. The White population decreased by about 7% while the Asian population increased by about 4%. Although there was a bump between 2000 and 2010 in Blacks of about 1%, the Black 2017 population figures remained nearly constant.

Table 5

Comparative Census Data on Race for Buffalo City and Lancaster Village 2000-2017

Race	Buffalo City 2000	Buffalo City 2010	Buffalo City 2013-2017 Estimates	Lancaster Village 2000	Lancaster Village 2010	Lancaster Village 2013-2017 Estimates
White	54.5%	50.4%	47.6%	98.6%	97.4%	96.9%
Black or African American	37.2%	38.6%	37.1%	0.3%	0.7%	0.5%
Asian	1.4%	3.2%	5.2%	0.1%	0.2%	1.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.8%	0.8%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Two or More Races	2.5%	3.1%	3.8%	0.5%	1.1%	1.3%
Other	3.7%	3.9%	5.8%	0.2%	0.3%	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). Community Facts Buffalo City. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml; Community Facts Lancaster. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF

According to U.S. Census Bureau (2017b), in contrast to Buffalo City, during the same time frame, Lancaster experienced a slight decrease of 2% in the White population, an increase of 1% in its Asian population, and only a 0.2% increase in its Black population. The 2017 data point that sticks out the most is the significantly higher percentage of White in Lancaster (96.9%) when compared with Buffalo City (47.6%). Lancaster is nearly monoracial.

Emerging Diversity in BSSDAC

This analysis raises the question how BSSDAC which is located in this White suburb of Buffalo became the multiracial church it is now. According to BSSDAC membership data as recorded in the online data system, eAdventist, the 2019 year-end membership totaled 575. Since this system does not record the racial category of each member, I had to enlist the assistance of several long-tenure church members to go through the membership and assign one of the racial and Hispanic origin categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau to each member (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017c, 2017d). The result of this analysis was reported in chapter 1, in Figure 2: the 2019 year-end membership of 575 was comprised of 222 White, 154 Black/African American, 128 Asian, 9 Two or More Races, 32 Other, and 30 Hispanic.

As reported in Table 1 (see chapter 1), the church membership figures showed a significant increase in membership that occurred during 2008-2010, when a large number of Karen (Asian) immigrant members, from Burma, joined the congregation. This is why by 2019 the Asian membership grew to 128, with the weekly attendance averaging 80 (see Figure 3). Table 1 further indicates a significant increase in membership during the years 2013-2014, when a group of Black immigrants joined the church. By 2019, the

Black and African American membership totaled 154, with a weekly attendance averaging 116 (see Figure 3).

These data show that much of the growth in racial diversity was a result of the influx of Karen and African immigrants over the last 12 years. Thus the growth of a racially mixed congregation coincided with the assimilation of refugees in nearby Buffalo City even though BSSDAC is located in a White Suburban community. The main racial group in Buffalo City other than White is Black. For this reason it should be noted that there are also two predominantly Black churches in the local area who have not turned multiracial. It was BSSDAC, located in a predominantly White community, where racial diversity flourished. This development is related to the fact that BSSDAC intentionally opened its doors to other racial groupings, including both the Karen (Asian) and African immigrants. To shed light on how this happened was one of the goals of the focus groups I conducted.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted with eight participants in each group. I selected individuals for the focus groups based on active church involvement or a leadership role. Active church involvement meant attending and participating in worship services and church functions regularly. Leadership role meant holding a church office and performing this function within the local church, such as elder, deacon, treasurer, etc. I selected participants with different durations of church membership, different ages, genders, and race. I used a script for participant recruitment, verbally inviting church members to participate in the focus groups.

Not everyone asked was available. Sixteen individuals agreed to participate and were placed in two focus groups of eight per group. Separation into groups was influenced by when individuals were available to meet. Focus groups were held one day apart. Each focus group met on a weekday evening at 7:00 pm.

Focus group A was conducted first, and focus group B was conducted second. Prior to conducting each focus group, all focus group participants were provided with a Consent Form (see Appendix D) to review and sign before beginning the interview. Participants were allowed time for questions. No one had questions regarding the consent form. All participants were aware that the focus group would be audio recorded, and agreed to this. Everyone signed the Consent Form.

Each focus group was conducted in BSSDAC's library with participants sitting around a table. I moderated each discussion. During the discussion, nobody else was in the library, making the room quiet. The conversation was audio recorded with a recording device after the written consent of all the participants. Although I led the discussion with a set of questions, participants were encouraged to share and express openly. The first focus group lasted one hour. The second focus group lasted one and one-half hours.

The atmosphere in the room during each focus group discussion was relaxed. No participant appeared anxious or hurried. Participants were encouraged to share honestly and were assured that their names would not appear in the research to identify their comments.

Each focus group participant is referenced in the study with a pseudonym. The pseudonyms use the word "Participant" followed by a number then a letter. The number

identifies them as one of the eight participants in each focus group. The subsequent letter references the focus group they were in. The focus groups are identified as focus group A and focus group B. For example focus group participants are identified as Participant 1a and Participant 1b to correlate with focus groups A and B.

The audio recording of the two focus groups was professionally transcribed using Rev.com. Of note, in the focus group transcription, the professional transcriptionist identified my voice as participant 1 in each group. Also in focus group A one of the participants voices is identified by two different numbers, as there is a total of 10 voices numbered in the transcription. I was unable to determine with certainty which one of the voices was labeled by two different participant numbers in the transcription. Thus although each focus group each contained only eight participants, the transcription of Focus group A identifies participant 1-10 and Focus group B identifies participant 1-9.

Focus Group Results Part 1

This section discusses findings from the focus groups. One purpose of the focus groups was to explore the multiracial character of BSSDAC and its growth. One of the research sub-questions that the focus groups sought to explore was: What are the perceived elements (principles, factors) that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation from the perspective of church leaders and members? To answer this general question, more specific questions were asked, listed in Appendix A as questions one to eight. The decision to include responses was based on the extent that the responses were felt to inform the research question. The findings regarding the perceived elements that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation are reported in this section.

Analysis of the focus group data transcripts revealed four major themes emerging from the two focus groups of church leaders and members. The major themes and sub-themes were:

1. Church Leaders and sub-themes such as, open-mindedness of pastor and inclusivity of lay leaders

2. Worship and sub-themes such as, transition from traditional to a variety of worship styles, and diversity in music and language

3. Commitment to People and sub-themes such as, utilization of material resources, welcoming into the church community, forming relationships, and church location

4. Openness to Change and sub-themes such as, language inclusion and translation, acceptance of racial diversity, and adapting to cultural differences.

I have organized the key responses from focus group participants regarding the perceived elements contributing to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation around these four themes.

Church Leaders

In BSSDAC, the church pastor is the only paid position. Local lay leaders are volunteers selected by a committee of local church members to serve in church office. One theme that permeated the discussion was the key role of the pastor in modeling openness to different racial groups BSSDAC needed to reach out to.

Open-mindedness of Pastor

Focus group Participant 4a noted that when Karen (Asian) refugee immigrants came to the Buffalo area, Pastor Harlin played a lead role in BSSDAC's outreach to this new racial group:

> It first started with the pastor, and Pastor Harlin was very instrumental in getting the Burmese [Karen] group [to start] coming to the church and getting them organized. And so the pastor plays a very big role in getting it all started and everyone else to work with them.

Additionally, it was noted that Pastor Harlin helped incorporate the Karen group into BSSDAC. For example, Participant 4b commented:

> I think one thing that kind of sticks out is like when the Karen started coming, Pastor Harlin – he really made an effort to incorporate [them]. Because we translated the service for the longest time, where you know [name of church members] or someone after the pastor would speak, they would translate back and forth so that people could hear it in their own language. And then we bought those headsets to see if they could wear them and hear it … I think that probably helped a lot of people that maybe didn't get a lot out of church because they didn't understand the language yet.

For Participant 4b, Pastor Harlin was committed to helping the new immigrants overcome language barriers as he endeavored to integrate the new immigrants in church through facilitating translation in the worship service. Furthermore, Participant 2b noted that Pastor Harlin personally modeled a commitment to racial diversity:

> I was wondering about Pastor Harlin when he first came, because Pastor Harlin, he'd grown up and in the deep south, in a rural south. And he preached all over it, including New Jersey and California. But it seemed to me that when he came here he encountered more congregational diversity than he had had before. And I think he had [to do] some adjusting to that, but he did; he adjusted. And the rest of us were having whatever adjustments that we needed to make. But it's really important when the pastor models that commitment and that adjustment. He was welcoming it.

For Participant 2b, accepting racial diversity necessitated adjustments. Pastor Harlin revealed a commitment to racial diversity within BSSDAC and personally modeled the needed adjustments. These personal adjustments came through a process

that both Pastor Harlin and church members experienced in their interaction with racially different people coming into the church. Culturally competent interactions and racially sensitive expression had to be learned, as seen through Pastor Harlin's interactions with the new immigrants. This insight emerged in the comment by Participant 2b:

> I think he [Pastor Harlin] grew in his cultural competence while he was here. There were things he was saying in his sermons early on that I thought would be [pause] trying to think of the word here. You sometimes say something and you want to say something positive about someone, but you accidentally say something negative… It's not like you're not as sensitive to what you're saying thinking it's positive, it's not so positive. You know what I mean?... I actually talked to him [Pastor Harlin] because I'm not aware of everything, but I was aware of some of that. So I talked to him privately and I said, 'I know your heart is really in a great place, but you're saying some things that could be hurtful to some people or at least a little insulting.' And I suggested some things he could do. … his heart was really obviously for people. And we also, as a congregation, I think we grew along with him in that, and I think we're able to be more warm and welcoming, and we need to keep doing that, being warm and welcoming.

Participant 2b pointed out that Pastor Harlin grew in cultural competence alongside the church members. It also indicates that a welcoming attitude toward racial diversity was something that BSSDAC had to learn.

Participants painted a remarkable open-mindedness when they noted Pastor Harlin's intentional outreach toward the Karen immigrants, the accommodations for language, the commitment toward diversity, his personal adjustments regarding racial diversity, and his process of growth in cultural competence. Thus according to focus group participants, the church pastor was instrumental in the transition of BSSDAC into a multiracial church.

Inclusivity of Lay Leaders

A second sub-theme that emerged within the Church Leaders theme was the active role of lay leaders in the formation of BSSDAC as a multiracial church. In the

early transition years when a few Black members merged into the church, the church board had to address the question of inclusivity and non-tolerance to racial discrimination in response to reactions to what some focus group members called "mumbling":

> Participant 2b: Can I tell you a story? Back in the '80s, there were some people in this church who, when the African American individuals started fellowshipping with us … they were like mumbling [against having Black church members]. And so in the church board we passed a resolution or a motion and we said, 'As a board, we welcome all individuals that want to be a part of this church.' And it was a board action, and we've made sure that the people who were mumbling that, that they got information that the board had said that. And then things kind of tamped down. They kept their opinions to themselves a little more. I don't think we changed their opinion, but they kept them to themselves.

Focus group Participant 3b further commented the "confrontational" dynamic that developed: "It was worse than mumbling. In some cases, it was confrontational. That wasn't good at all. I saw one first hand." In response to the situation, Participant 5b stated: "We passed a resolution again" [that all individuals were welcome]. And as Participant 2b clarified, "But when the board did that, when the board passed that, I think that, that kinda set it." Participant 8b, an African American female added: "It was said to my parents when they were first baptized here. And they told whoever it was, 'Nope, we're comfortable here.'" Even with comments circulating against having Black church members, the overarching sentiment promoted by church leadership provided the needed clarity for this African American family to feel "comfortable" at BSSDAC and choose to stay.

It is apparent in this dialogue, that BSSDAC leaders openly addressed racial discrimination issues when BSSDAC started to open its doors to racial diversity. This decided stance of church leaders to be accepting of racial diversity in the church occurred years before the influx of immigrant refugees and development of a multiracial church

that began around 2008. Throughout the transition into a multiracial church, BSSDAC lay leaders maintained this intentional position of inclusivity with non-tolerance for racial discrimination, and promoted this expectation, as articulated by Participant 4b:

> If something came up that became an issue, I think it would be dealt with rather quickly. I don't think it would be something that you let fester. We would talk about it, and, 'Okay. Let's treat it as the board should…' It's not going to be [a] public kind of thing. It's going to be taken care of in a discreet fashion. But there's going to be an agreement that 'I don't think we stand for it.' So when you say, 'No, that's not who we are, so if you don't want any part of that, you're free to go and be wherever you want.' But the leadership is going to say, 'That's not who we are here.' Like you said, when the people at work, they're making off color jokes, it's like, 'No, that's not who I am.'

How important these issues became for the lay leadership of the church can be gleaned from a comment that linked the acceptance of other races into the church to godly leadership:

> Maybe that's one of the reasons though, there's been so much success with Buffalo Suburban and the leadership. There's been that godly leadership because you can address all of those issues [racism, discrimination, acceptance, social justice] indirectly from the spiritual point of view. And even the godly leadership is critical to that. And you see that growth [with] those leaders. (Participant 9b)

The commitment to racial inclusion, Participant 2b observed, led some lay leaders to suspect that some would-be members had possibly not stayed at BSSDAC for discriminatory reasons:

> And it's probably happened that there have been people of that frame of mind that have come to our church and felt like this isn't their place for that reason. And it isn't their place. Unless they're willing to adapt and be more accepting, this is not a place for them because we're not going to stand for that.

Racially diverse lay leaders were incorporated in BSSDAC concurrently with the emerging racial diversity of church members. Individuals of different racial backgrounds were integrated into local church offices that comprise the local church board. Participant 8a specifically underlined "diversity within the elders which we have;

diversity with the deaconesses, which we have… I see diversity in the children's group."

Participant 2b also commented on the inclusivity within lay leaders:

> In the elder group, we've had African American elders along with White elders. And for a long time, we've had at least one Hispanic elder. So there's one kind of diversity. We haven't had female elders always, but we have female elders now. That's another kind of, not racial, but it's the kind of diversity that a church should have… In the Karen group, we had Daniel as an elder, and his father was an elder before that … And then the deacons, there is some diversity of participation in deacons and deaconesses.

Racial diversity among local church leaders set the tone for an accepting racially inclusive church atmosphere among members. Participant 5a put it this way:

> I think in the various offices that we have: our pastor is Hispanic. And we have elders that are White, Black, Hispanic. We have deacons, deaconesses. We have in a lot of our offices diversity. When church members see that their officers are diverse, it helps to then strengthen the belief that the church itself is accepting of anyone.

Thus participants identified the role of church leaders. They expressed the open-mindedness of the pastor, identifying Pastor Harlin as instrumental in facilitating transition and intentionally embracing racial diversity. They identified the inclusivity of lay leaders as a key factor, noting the definitive stance they took to make BSSDAC open to racial diversity and oppose discrimination. They pointed out that having the local church lay leadership roles held by racially diverse members made a statement that BSSDAC was intentionally a racially diverse church and intentionally welcomed diversity. Thus for focus group participants, Church Leaders were an element that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

Worship

In addition to Church Leaders, Worship was identified as a second major theme with sub-themes of transition from traditional to a variety of worship styles and diversity

in music and language. This theme refers to the worship experience occurring during weekly Saturday morning church services.

Transition From Traditional to a Variety of Worship Styles

The worship services in BSSDAC were historically traditional with use of hymnals and organ/piano accompaniment. This changed when in the 1980s Pastor Giller introduced variety in worship music styles, worship format, and worship participants. The transition in worship style included a shift from using a hymnal to projecting words on a screen, and from just organ/piano music to multiple instruments. Speaking of the traditional worship format, Participant 5a said:

> That changed with Pastor Giller. And he wanted to introduce newer more contemporary music so the worship was to God and not about God, and would involve more people. And I know when we started that transition to the overhead, I believe it was me and possibly [name of church member]. And we were the only two instruments that played. And then we progressed from just the two flutes. Then we went and included then a violin and then a saxophone. And then the music group to the point where we had this small orchestra of about 20 kids. And it was made up of mostly young adults and youth, young teenagers.

This transition in the worship style and the integration of the first Black church members into BSSDAC occurred during the same general time period:

> I was going to say that when [pause] for whatever reason, [name of church member], and for whatever reason, your parents, and [name of church member] and other African Americans, who had other options for a church home, when they came here and joined us, they really did us a favor… I think that, in a way, they were like African American missionaries to the White Church. Not that that's a conscious thought that they may have had, but in practical matters they helped some of us in ways that we wouldn't have had that exposure. Anyway, I just thought that that was a good thing. (Participant 2b)

With the entrance of a few Black church members, further adjustments occurred in the worship experience. Participant 3b noted that the worship participation style of

some of the new Black members was different than the traditional participation of White members:

> I remember when [name of a Black church member], like you said, came to the church and it was a little bit of a cultural adjustment because never before did we have 'Amen'… or he'll yell out, and it's like… And he wasn't the only one, but he was the most. But that was kind of an adjustment.

Participant 4a commented how BSSDAC involved a Black church member/musician in worship ministry, where a genre of spirituals became incorporated in the worship music; additionally diversification of worship styles involved different racial groups in worship:

> He [name of a Black church member] introduced a whole new brand of praise music and got more of the youth involved. So that was another generation. We have a third generation now. We have one old one that's been right along with [names of church members] and her group. We've graduated, even though some have moved away, there was always a new generation of groups that kept everyone involved. That certainly contributes to cohesiveness that everybody works together and has a feeling that they're part of the church.

This participant suggested that although there was openness and inclusion of variety in worship style and music, BSSDAC did not eliminate the use of traditional songs and hymns. This balance between inclusion of music styles was also voiced by Participant 9b:

> The other thing though, when we moved here was the balance between an older generation, and that may have a certain music preference, and the younger generation. Neither one was necessarily, at least in my opinion, was necessarily edged out. There was an excellent balance, which is very hard to attain and maintain.

There was transition from just traditional to variety of worship styles. The worship experience transitioned from the sole use of hymnals to a projector/ screen for songs, from just organ/piano accompaniment to variety of instruments, from only hymns to variety of music styles including contemporary praise songs and spirituals. This

transition was noted by participants prior to the diversity in music and language that occurred with the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation. Thus, the gradual introduction to multiracialism in BSSDAC was a response to intentional realities. BSSDAC had intentionally initiated change and diversity within the worship experience. The changes resulted in involvement of youth and the return of inactive members, in addition to a few Black church members merging into the new worship culture. These changes did not effect a multiracial church right away; however they opened the church up to the possibility of diversity and got it ready for bigger racial changes that came in the 2000s.

Diversity in Music and Language

Another sub-theme that emerged in the discussion of worship was the need to diversify also the language of worship to accommodate different immigrant groups. This need coincided with the influx of immigrants into the BSSDAC membership around 2008-2014, first from Burma and then from Africa. The effect of this diversification in language was noted by Participant 8b:

> If I may speak about the music. If you notice the hymns transcend language, age, and all of that. When we're singing the hymns, even those who don't speak English know what the song is, and they sing in their language. So when it comes to music and diversity though, hymns really transcend all of that.

For Participant 8b, music was an element of the worship experience that was unifying amidst diversity of language. Music provided a way for the new immigrants to connect in the worship experience despite language differences as hymns were sung together by racially different members, each in their own language. Diversity in music through language was also seen in special music as stated by Participant 6a: “They also participated in the worship service with special music in their language and their outfits.”

Participant 7b remembers: "We've always embraced special music. They had little choirs … They would sing in their own languages, and it was always very well accepted and welcomed. Embraced." Similarly, Participant 5a noted the participation in worship services contributed to the music and language diversity that seemed to engage people:

> There's different musical teams that lead out. There are different people that have intercessory prayer, different types of children stories. The ability to allow multiple special music to occur. The service as a whole makes people feel welcome and willing to take part in it.

The same participant also noted that church leadership roles held by racially diverse church members resulted in different languages spoken in the service itself:

> And even during communion sometimes there would be an elder up there whose English wasn't their first language. And they would have the prayer before either the juice or the bread in their native language.

In addition, Participant 5a also noted that this diversity expressed in worship made the worship event a more personalized experience:

> I think our worship service has become more personal. It's not just one song that is sung, but it's multiple songs. And there are more people participating in the worship service, which I think makes them feel part of the service. And people don't feel like they need to be in church, have a 20 minute service and get out the door. They enjoy worshiping together more. And because of that it makes them want to stay and associate with others and get to know people and become aware of the people around them and not just sitting in a seat warming it up and then leaving.

Participant 6a suggested the multiple facets of diversity in worship experience helped members to identify the church as their church:

> Yeah, I believe that they feel more proud of it. People form a part of what's happening in church. Because they're involved, because there are more options, because there are more groups. And so they're feeling more encouraged.

Participants suggested the worship experience facilitated participation by racially diverse individuals and embraced diversity in language and music. This diversity in

music and language within the worship service apparently facilitated personal expression in different ways, and fostered connections.

Thus participants described how the worship experience underwent transition, which led to an environment including more variety in music styles and participants. They pointed out that church members accepted different music, worship styles, and languages, while keeping some traditional worship elements and music selections. They suggested that the inclusive and diverse worship experience at BSSDAC, including the diversity in music and language, encouraged participation from different racial groups and promoted a sense of belonging. Thus for focus group participants, Worship contributed to the growth of BSSD as a multiracial congregation.

Commitment to People

In addition to the Church Leaders and Worship themes, Commitment to People was identified as a third major theme with sub-themes of utilization of material resources, welcoming into the church community, forming relationships, and church location. The sub-theme utilization of material resources included providing transportation, clothes, and food to refugees. The sub-theme welcoming into the church community encompassed welcoming racial diversity. The sub-theme forming relationships included factors fostering relationships among church members. The sub-theme church location included the influence of the church's location affecting people accessing church.

Utilization of Material Resources

As focus group participants discussed the influx of refugees, they discussed how material resources had been used to help refugee immigrants. For example, as the church

began its outreach to Karen/Burmese refugee immigrants it began to provide transportation from downtown Buffalo to BSSDAC:

> Participant 4a: The church went out of their way to try to encourage and invite and make them comfortable. When the Burmese first started immigrating into the Buffalo area, we would rent a bus so that they could get here in church. So that they had an opportunity and that bus was full. And this was a school bus.
>
> Participant 5a: I think it was a wonderful service and that there were some people who specifically donated to cover that cost.

Providing transportation to BSSDAC when the Karen refugees first arrived facilitated the refugee immigrants coming to BSSDAC. Over time many of these individuals obtained their own vehicles and the mode of transportation provided by BSSDAC changed to a van.

> Participant 3b: So I think part of this growth could have to do with … a lot more resources. For example, we have a van to go pick people up. So a church that has fewer resources might not be able to do that.

BSSDAC also utilized resources to provide food for immigrant refugees as another way to connect with them:

> …she organized a food drive for the refugees. And there was a lot of food.... we asked them their address and she took to some families. I also took to some families. They were surprised and they were happy of course getting food. And again it goes back to show that there are people who care. So that's something which has been done. Especially these were the African immigrants. (Participant 7a)

In addition to food drives, Participant 4a explained another way that BSSDAC reached out to the immigrant refugees was by providing resources including clothes and household items:

> We showed our care for some of the refugees. The one thing I'm thinking about is one of our members passed away here a couple of years ago. And she left everything to the church and there were a lot of items, clothes, you name it … We brought all of it here to the church, set it up in the gym, and just let the African group know that all this was available. And after church they walked through and helped themselves to

whatever it was that they could use. And that gave them the feeling that there's love here in this church.

In response to the following question: Can you give an incident, story, description, or compelling experience that illustrates the relationship between racial diversity and church growth of BSSDAC? Participant 5a described how some church members saw the need of an expectant young minority couple and met it by hosting a baby shower, as stated:

> The most recent one for me personally is one of the women in our church, her name is [name of church member] and she's from Ethiopia. And when we found out that she was pregnant that we had a baby shower for her. Because one of the women were talking with her and found out that she had nothing for this baby that was coming and this was their first child. And I just loved how the women of the church rallied together to put this baby shower together for her and I think she was just so surprised and exhaultic about everyone helping her out that way. And her husband rented a small moving van and brought it here so she could take these gifts home. People were able to find a crib for her and a mattress and gently used things that she could use and diapers and clothing. And I think the surprise that she experienced and her husband you just couldn't wipe that smile off his face. He could not believe when they started bringing the stuff out and putting it in the little moving van they had. They were just so excited. To me that's the most recent one that I can think of.

Participants suggested that employing resources to address physical needs such as transportation, food, and clothes connected BSSDAC with racially diverse individuals.

Welcoming Into the Church Community

A second sub-theme that emerged in the Commitment to People theme was the importance of welcoming people. Participant 9b suggested that being welcomed at the door created the potential for a good experience and the possibility of visitors staying:

> . . . once they've come to the location, they walk in, have they been welcomed? 'Oh, that was a nice experience.' We all function kind of the same way. 'Oh, that was a nice experience. I wouldn't mind having that again.' . . . One step at a time. Getting them in the door, keeping them in the door. But that's from a purely business standpoint.

A young Black female church member noted that it felt more natural in the racially diverse environment of BSSDAC than at an all-Black SDA church in Buffalo:

> Speaking of comfortable, [name of church member], my parents always traveled all around to all types of churches, had all types of friends, and that's how we were raised. And so being in the city in an all-Black church, I mean, we were comfortable, but it wasn't natural for us to be around one type of people. So coming here, [name of church member], was comfortable. (Participant 8b)

She remembered how her family was made to feel comfortable specifically through the racial diversity found in BSSDAC. BSSDAC was intentional to make the refugee immigrants feel welcome:

> And that's what has happened in our past. The Burmese came into the Buffalo area. We took that group, nurtured them, made them feel welcome in America. And be able to better learn how the system in America works. And show them that God's love is here in this area. (Participant 5a)

The question arose in the focus group discussion whether racially diverse individuals came to BSSDAC because they were already Adventist and looking for an Adventist church, or if they came because it was a racially diverse church. Participant 4b articulated:

> I'm wondering though, is it due to the fact that they come because they're affiliated with the Adventist Church and they come here, versus coming here because there's a diverse group here? … 'Okay, if I move to a different city, I'm going to go to an Adventist Church.'

Participant 5b noted that although many of the refugees who came to BSSDAC were already SDA when they immigrated, some individuals in these immigrant communities joined the church who were not already SDA:

> Some of them have a history, some of them don't. Some of them are drawn when they come in, they meet among their friends, 'Don't you want to go to church? Where do you go?' 'Oh, I go to Seventh Day Adventist.' 'Well, let me go see what that's like.' You know, just to belong somewhere where there's a community of people that can, especially, I think for the refugees, they join communities to help them out with to know how they live, 'How do we live life in America?' It's a different kind of life for

> them. And I'm assuming same as the Karens, they do the same thing. So some of them joined, and some of them didn't even know any church. But once they come here, they learn about God, 'Well, I went through all those things. Somehow it has to be a Being that helped me.'

Several participants thought that belonging to the BSSDAC community was attractive to both some SDA and non-SDA immigrants:

> Earlier we did say that for the past ten years, for one reason, we attracted … the immigrants or the refugees from different places … into this church. I don't have the background or how they got themselves here. But I'm saying that since they came here so there was a welcoming environment … and they have stayed. (Participant 7a)

Whether the individuals who came to BSSDAC from the refugee immigrant communities were previously SDA or converted after contact with BSSDAC, being welcomed into the BSSDAC community was what influenced them to stay. Welcoming immigrants gave BSSDAC a common purpose, and helped the church members grow together through their efforts to reach out:

> Certainly the integration of the refugee groups has helped get the church together more as a group, trying to help them along. And it has helped in the growth of the church too because we've been able to assimilate different cultures that have given us better backgrounds in their church activities and how they worship and things like that. It's been helpful that way. (Participant 4a)

Participant 2b described how being a welcoming church was important:

> But I do think that probably it's wonderful for people to be able to fellowship and feel socially comfortable while they're being theologically challenged… But socially, it'd be nice if we felt comfortable with the social relations that we have. Rather than saying, 'Gee, I don't know, I'm really being challenged spiritually and the people are cold and hint exclusive,' then that's really a double whammy … if they can at least feel comfortable socially while they're having spiritual principles taught too.

Also Participant 4b expressed welcoming diversity was not limited to refugee immigrants, as BSSDAC welcomed racially mixed families: "We've also had a lot of interracial couples too. You know what I mean? Like, the [names of church members]. Very, very involved in the church."

Participant 3a remembered the translation of the worship service for non-English speakers as making BSSDAC feel welcoming to even himself, an English-speaking individual. He commented that observing the translation even influenced his personal conversion experience:

> I remember when I first started coming here, it was amazing to see four different languages being spoken in the sanctuary. You had the pastor, then you had one person that was interpreting, and then there were different sections of the church where each one of them had interpreters too. And it was amazing. It made me feel more welcome as a new believer… I grew up as an Adventist, but I didn't accept Christ as my personal savior till three years ago. That was part of it. Watching that happen in the sanctuary I was like, this is amazing. It was something special.

As illustrated by Participant 7a, an African member, the inclusion of different languages in the worship service generated a sense of belonging for some individuals:

> I did song service during Sabbath in Swahili. We also had Sabbaths where it was led by Hispanics… That also then shows or adds to the point that the environment that the church made the people who were different to feel that they are part of the church or the group. There was representation in that kind of ministry or service.

In response to the question: "Can you give an incident, story, description, or compelling experience that illustrates the relationship between racial diversity and church growth of BSSDAC?" Participant 10a shared how language translation and welcoming of immigrant children through the children's church ministry illustrated this relationship:

> It's been a few of them. Like I said the first one was when I walked into the church and there was all these different interpretations of the ceremony going on. And then another one for me with the children's church we used to have so many kids back there. And I did a lesson on John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. And I had the boxes piled up and there was supposed to be water and we were baptizing people and all the kids. I was up there for like 20 minutes. We ran late that day because all the kids wanted to be baptized. It was solely different types of kids coming up. Some of them didn't even know how to speak fluent English but they understood what was going on. And then after that we got in groups and we prayed. It was five different groups and some of the kids were praying for so many different things but they were praying for parents to come to church too. These are little kids. Some of their parents weren't coming to church yet. And they were there and they were like, 'Please Lord help my parents to come to church.' I heard some of them were talking about some of

> their fathers were drinking and please help, but they were speaking in broken EEnglish. I could barely understand it but all the others in the group could understand what they were saying. It was amazing.

Participant 3b shared a story about a Black young lady who, with her family, were attending a Black SDA church from the Regional Conference in Buffalo, but then came to BSSDAC where they were welcomed into the church community:

> I remember [name of church member], the [name] family, when they first started coming, she came, I think it was her first or second week … and we were talking to her in the sanctuary and she said, 'I really love it here. I just feel like there's such a peace here.' And she had come from Emmanuel Temple, where I guess they didn't have that feeling. But I think that that's just an incident that comes to mind.

Looking at the contemporary reality of immigration Participant 10a suggested that BSSDAC must be ready to welcome more racial diversity and to keep its doors open to immigrants:

> So externally in a worldview … immigration comes from places where there's conflict. So focusing, we have to be ready for that next wave wherever they're coming from. It's like the Catholics are there, they know where they're coming from and they're there, waiting in the shore for them. Adventist, we gotta be the same way. Because there's different conflicts in the world. And when immigration clears up, because it will, we have to be ready. They're on the shore. To grab them and bring them to our church. We gotta have interpreters ready, wherever they're coming from.

In the view of one participant, welcoming racial diversity may effect church growth:

> It's something different than what I grew up with. Back in the day there was the Black church and then the White church and then the Spanish church and now we're under one roof… For us to be welcoming everyone is going to probably grow our church eventually. (Participant 3a)

BSSDAC was a welcoming community. People were welcomed through language accommodation, translation, language inclusion, and music in different languages. Welcoming fostered involvement. A welcoming environment created a "nice experience" where people could feel "socially comfortable." Refugee immigrants and

racially mixed families were embraced in the church community whether they were already SDA or not. Comments and experiences suggested that this intentional welcoming environment contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

Forming Relationships

A third sub-theme that emerged in the Commitment to People theme was the opportunity to build relationships through different groups. Participant 4b noted that in BSSDAC there were many opportunities to build relationships through doing things together for people of different age groups and interests, as exemplified by a pickle ball group for exercise, a senior citizens group for the older members, and Pathfinders and Adventurers clubs for children:

> But when you do things together, then you form those friendships. So again, it's kind of like making an opportunity for people to come together. Because people have all different kinds of needs. So like the exercise, they have the older group that are doing things… you're trying to do different things to meet different needs because there's many different groups in the church. We have people with young kids, we have people with grown up kids. We have older people. So we want to meet up. There's a lot of needs.

Participant 7b remembered vividly how her own family had been affected by a nursing home ministry:

> My mom … when she ended up in a nursing home, he [a church member] would go visit her and sing for her. And I just thought that was just a really sweet bond between the two of them.

Participant 3a suggested that relationships contributed to church growth:

> I'm basically newer to the church, baptized three years ago, but from the time that I've been here I've seen better relationships. It's been more welcoming at the door. We have people that greet you when you walk through the door. Outside of church there's things that we do together like the pickle ball and the progressive dinners and things like that. It's not just a relationship in church, it's more of a relationship outside the church as well. That's what I've seen.

Participant 4b specifically underlined how relationships created bonds amidst racial diversity:

> I think a lot of personal relationships. Like you say, [name of church member] brought other people. [name of church member] always brings the people… When you do something like invite people to your house, have lunch, you've formed those bonds, those relationships. Pastor Harlin [pause]. We had friends who were in the hospital and everything. And whenever we went, he always came. You could tell that he had qualities that really helped him try to reach out to help the people. He couldn't speak. He would slaughter people's names. He couldn't say anyone's last name. First names are very difficult, I think, sometimes. But he had a heart for the people. He would try to do Bible studies, and have people translate for him. So it really made people feel that he cared about them. And I think that translates to a lot of the people here. Once they get to know people, they're like, 'Oh, they seem to be like family.'

Through relationships and connections, BSSDAC became a place where racially different individuals became "knit" together into the church body:

> It's kind of just a presentation that what is offered here transcends those dividers. And that there's something [pause] it may take some time to look around and find a story that you can identify with in somebody else, and connect yourself with that, and knit that church together through those stories. (Participant 9b)

When asked: "Can you give an incident, story, description, or compelling experience that illustrates the relationship between racial diversity and church growth of BSSDAC?" Participant 4b, a White church member, recalled being welcomed by a Black church member who initially reached out with a hug:

> I would say for myself, I was baptized …. back in, I think it was 2000, in the church. I think that was the time I met [name of church member] really. He came over, and he gave me a big hug. I mean, ever since then, it seems like he's been my brother.

For Participant 4b, the relationship that formed between them was that of family, despite the racial difference. Participant 5b, a Black female church member, recalled being welcomed by a White family in the church, leading to an interracial friendship:

> When I first moved to Buffalo, these were my first friends. They invited me to their home, they cooked for me, we interacted. And just them doing that made me feel very welcomed…They made me feel very welcomed here. That led to a good friendship.

Participant 6b put it this way:

> Well, it seems like, from what most people are saying, the theory should be at first you look around and you see all these people are different from me. Then you interact with them, realize, 'Well, actually, we're people and we're all children of God.' And then, in theory, that should open you up to more interactions with more people who you think are different from you at first. So if people have that kind of mindset and they're in the world interacting with people who they think are different from them, but they're still comfortable doing that, then that should lead to the kinds of relationship that bring about growth.

Thus participants described how relationships developed through church ministries and social activities where people of different ages, interest, needs, and racial groups connected. Interracial relationships were formed between long-term and incoming members. Comments and experiences suggested that relationships contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

Church Location

A fourth sub-theme that emerged within the Commitment to People theme was the location of BSSDAC. Participant 9b noted that BSSDAC's re-location in the 1980s from downtown to the suburbs of Buffalo made it more accessible to multiple surrounding communities in addition to Buffalo City:

> From purely, purely business perspective, first thing being location, location, location, Buffalo Suburban is in the location. The freeway is right there. And as far as getting into downtown and the surrounding area, people drive half hour more to come here. You don't see that in, say, Lockport. The location isn't there. So from a purely business perspective, that's there.

This comment suggested the strategic central location, both accessible and visible, influenced people coming to BSSDAC. In the view of Participant 5a, the visible location near the main interstate created awareness of the church's presence:

> Definitely. I think because we face the through-way and we're just a couple of miles from an exit, we're just a couple of miles from the airport and hotels. We've had truckers stop their rigs on the through-way because they saw a church here.

Although the immediate suburban community where BSSDAC relocated was predominantly White, the racial diversity in Buffalo City impacted racial diversity in BSSDAC:

> I think part of it is simple availability just because of the circumference around us is incredibly diverse, which is a little bit unique. You go into some smaller areas or Midwest or other places like that, you just don't have the diversity (Participant 9b).

Within discussion of what contributed to BSSDAC members becoming more accepting of racially diverse people, Participant 4a noted that a stable church location was a contributing factor:

> Part of it had to be that we had a church. We had a building that was dedicated as the church. Prior to that the church was roaming a lot. It was located downtown first. And then they had to rent buildings and then finally built this church and that contributed to allow people to keep coming and search out if they were visitors. They would search out where they could find an SDA church and this would come up. And having the building here contributed [a] lot to its growth.

Participants' comments suggested that BSSDAC's suburban relocation and construction of a church fostered stability, centrality, accessibility, and visibility. These comments suggested that its location contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

BSSDAC showed a Commitment to People. Participants illustrated how investing resources to meet physical needs such as providing transportation, clothes, and food connected BSSDAC with racially diverse individuals. They suggested that providing transportation specifically contributed to the influx of refugee immigrants in BSSDAC. They noted that welcoming and incorporating racially diverse individuals favored growth toward a multiracial congregation. They discussed how relationships

were fostered among all racial groups. Comments suggested the church location being stable, central, accessible, and visible, favored racially diverse growth. Thus for focus group participants, Commitment to People contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

Openness to Change

In addition to the Church Leaders, Worship, and Commitment to People themes, Openness to Change was identified as a fourth major theme with sub-themes of language inclusion and translation, acceptance of racial diversity, and adapting to cultural differences. The sub-theme language inclusion and translation addressed how multiple language groups were incorporated in BSSDAC with different translation approaches to meet the needs of different language groups. The sub-theme acceptance of racial diversity encompassed different ways that BSSDAC showed acceptance. The sub-theme adapting to cultural differences included the adjustments to ethnic foods and cultural differences in worship.

Language Inclusion and Translation

BSSDAC was open to translation of the services coinciding with the influx of Karen (Asian) and African refugee immigrants:

> When new refugees got here, there was translation which was done for the new members or people who can't speak the language… That did help those new members or new refugees or new families. (Participant 7a)

One participant noted that church members were not only open to translation but also willing to change their seating to facilitate people sitting next to someone who could translate:

> And we made an effort to make sure everyone was part of the service. Like you were saying, there were little pockets where people were whispering and doing the translation besides having someone upfront doing the translation and standing next to the pastor. But we were accepting of that. People just moved so that they would be in a little pockets to be able to translate, while others that just pushed forward to give them their space so that they can translate. (Participant 5a)

In addition to language translation, BSSDAC members were open to having multiple language groups incorporated into services:

> Participant 2b: Well, they were talking about the Karen singing in their own native language.
>
> Participant 3b: And we had African immigrants singing as well.
>
> Participant 2b: And we had Spanish speaking individuals leading worship in Spanish or singing songs in Spanish.

To incorporate language groups, BSSDAC facilitated Sabbath school classes in up to five languages:

> Participant 5a: Besides having the English-speaking classes, we had a Spanish speaking class, we had the class of African immigrants and that was Swahili. And then the Karen had their Sabbath school class as well. And then the other group … Ethiopia.
>
> Participant 3a: So it was like five or six congregations under one roof.

When asked whether language inclusion and translation makes people feel comfortable in the church, Participant 3b responded: "Absolutely." Participant 9b stated: "Yes, it does." Participant 2b added: "It should." And Participant 9b put it this way:

> You're in a new country, everything's harder. Life is just harder. Everything is more challenging, it takes more thought or it takes more, many more steps or whatnot. And then they come together with a group of people where you don't even have to think about the words you use, you just talk.

For Participant 9b, BSSDAC's openness for inclusion of native languages was perceived as attractive to the refugee immigrants. In the view of one participant, translation of services was identified as attractive to the immigrants:

> Translation did encourage or contributed to the growth. When these people were coming here they knew that when they come to the church of course they're going to learn or understand the language. So they would like to come to Suburban [BSSDAC]. (Participant 7a)

Thus participants described how BSSDAC was open to the change from being just an English-speaking group to a multilingual congregation. BSSDAC both incorporated native languages and provided various forms of translation for the racially diverse church members. Comments suggested that language inclusion and translation contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

Acceptance of Racial Diversity

A second sub-theme that emerged within the Openness to Change theme was an acceptance of racial diversity. Participant 2a suggested that BSSDAC grew in this area:

> It all depends on how you measure growth. Sometimes it's not measured in numbers. It might be measured in relationships, spirituality, knowledge, money and things like that. I have seen growth from the standpoint of people getting along better and being in a more loving spirit, being more friendly. That's the growth that I've seen.

When asked: "Describe what relationship, if any, you see between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC?" Participants 2b and 4b shared a Biblical story to illustrate their view:

> Participant 4b: Look at the experiences of Jesus, when he went to talk to the Samaritan woman. The disciples didn't want to [pause] 'What are you doing talking to her?' They didn't say that. But he showed that he accepted her. And then she went and told all the town about, 'Look at this man.' It can't not work. You know what I mean? Jesus gave us that example that by reaching out to those people, he made them feel accepted, and then they tell their people.
>
> Participant 2b: But he genuinely loved everyone.
>
> Participant4b: Yeah, he did it.
>
> Participant 2b: The woman who was accused of prostitution. He was accepting and supportive of her when everyone else was scorning her, ready to stone her. The tax

collector, Zacchaeus. He said, 'I'm coming to your house today. Let's have a conversation.'

Participant 4b: Yeah. So he gave us an example. So if we're doing that same thing, people feel love, people will feel connected. It can't help but make things increase.

These participants further illustrated that just as exposure to racial differences for their kids at school, exposure to racial diversity in BSSDAC could cultivate cultural competence with a learned acceptance of racial diversity:

Participant 4b: I think like our kids go on through the school and all, they ... Color means nothing to them.

Participant 2b: They've developed cultural competence.

Participant 4b: Yeah. They're their friends are Black, Hispanic. It doesn't matter, they're just people. So our children have learned the way to accept people for who they are.

In the view of one participant, the racially diverse environment within BSSDAC portrayed a sense of acceptance that facilitated church members bringing others:

For us I think because of the area that we live in Western New York, we are a very diverse county. And I think our church reflects that. And because we have such a diverse congregation, people feel comfortable telling friends or relatives about this church. And they feel more comfortable bringing people when knowing they'll be accepted for what's in their heart and not what you see externally. (Participant 5a)

Expressed by Participant 4b, acceptance of racial diversity was explained as: "They were born that way. You can't change that… God made you." For Participant 4b, respecting racial heritage, the things that are unchangeable, showed acceptance. The question was asked: "Can you give an incident, story, description, or compelling experience that illustrates the relationship between racial diversity and church growth of BSSDAC?" Participant 5b, a Black African, commented on his experience immigrating to the United States:

> I'm a foreigner. I'm from Africa, I'm Zambian. I wasn't born in America. Well, the difference of [pause] I guess I can cheat because our first language is English. So for me, I don't have a problem with the language. But still I came to a different country. I had to adjust. I had to fit in somehow. I couldn't always isolate myself as, 'Well, I can't do that because I'm not one of them.' You have to fit in.

Participant 5b found BSSDAC to be an environment where he "fit in," because BSSDAC accepted racial diversity. Participant 9b, a White female who had grown up in the North East, moved to the West coast and married, then moved to Buffalo and joined BSSDAC with her family, shared her experience of how returning as an adult to visit the racially homogeneous church where she had grown up was stifling, whereas coming to racially diverse BSSDAC was refreshing:

> This is more general, but we came from California, and it's very diverse out there. Coming back here, [name of husband] being from California, born and raised, and my mom being born and raised in New England, but married to a California guy. So I got to see the New England, and a little more of the narrow sameness. And of course I didn't grow up with that. It wasn't in our home. But that was her background. But to come from California to here ... it was easy. It was comfortable because it was always more difficult to go back to my very small home church, which was very narrow, and there was some of the smaller churches. And after being out there, it was hard to breathe in those scenarios. So it was easy to come back. It was refreshing.

BSSDAC accepted racial diversity:

> Participant 3a: That's one of the first things that I tell people about our church. We have a lot of different people from a lot of different places.

> Participant 8a: I call our church the rainbow church. Because we have so many different ethnic groups in here and it's refreshing. Anyone can come through that door and feel at home.

Thus participants described how BSSDAC showed acceptance of racial diversity. Comments suggested that acceptance of racial diversity contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

Adapting to Cultural Differences

A third sub-theme that emerged within the Openness to Change theme was an adaptation to cultural differences. Participant 4b commented on an event where BSSDAC has celebrated diversity. The International Festival provided an opportunity to both experience and adapt to diversity as individuals from different racial backgrounds provided ethnic foods and shared their different cultures:

> It's like when we have the international food thing. Who doesn't like to eat all the different specialty foods that other people [pause] things you would never make at your house. But you can go and taste. Someone who makes this, and that's a specialty. It's like, 'Oh, who doesn't like that?' I mean, that's a way that people can enjoy other cultures. 'Oh, you make that. Oh, that's wonderful. Give me the recipe for that kind of thing.' You know what I mean? Little things like that make a difference. It's different, but it's good. And we learn to enjoy that.

In the view of Participant 2b, exposure to racially diverse church members in BSSDAC created an awareness of diversity and an opportunity to adapt to these differences:

> So sometimes churches can be judgmental places where you go there and you get judged by other people. So unless you feel pretty strong, the judging can wear you down. So imagine Buffalo Suburban has some tendency that have that quality in it, but then we have individuals joining in large numbers who are culturally diverse. And some people who were judging their fellow White, Whites judging Whites. And they're judging in front of the Whites. And then now they have all these immigrants and they learned, 'Wait a minute, I should give them some slack there. They're not from my cultural background. I should not be judgmental of them.' And so they pull back on that, and then they have the impulse to judge their White brother, and they say, 'Wait a minute. He or she might be a little different. I didn't realize it.'

For Participant 2b, this awareness of diversity was noted to minimize judgmental attitudes toward other racial groups and even among Whites. Participant 4b put it this way:

> It would be boring if we're all the same, wouldn't it? I mean, God's the God of creating, right? Variety. He shows that there's endless [pause] you never had the same

> fingerprint, that you never had the same eye print. We're so wonderfully made that there's not [a] mold for anyone of us. We're all unique. That's creation.

When asked: "Does that mean that the church has to adapt to the people that live around the church?" Participant 3b replied: "I think that's what we did. Had we not then I don't think we'd be able to be as diverse as we are today." This comment suggested that BSSDAC was intentional about adapting to diverse people. When asked for an experience to illustrate the relationship between racial diversity and church growth, Participant 3b, a White member, shared an example from when BSSDAC was a predominantly White congregation and a few Black members joined, bringing a different type of participation in worship. White BSSDAC members adapted to the expressive responses of the Black members:

> I remember when [name of church member], like you said, came to the church and it was a little bit of a cultural adjustment because never before did we have 'Amen'… or he'll yell out, and it's like… And he wasn't the only one, but he was the most. But that was kind of an adjustment.

Although some people left, many BSSDAC members were willing to adapt to change, variety, and different styles in the worship experience:

> I think God's in control, and He brings people that need to be here and people that need to move on … they do. I mean, you see that. That there's different dynamics. There needs to be change. There always needs to be change. You can't have a static life. Life always has to change one way or the other. Church has to change… Okay, well now we have this style of worship, two, three weeks out of a month. Okay, well that's, that's what we have now. (Participant 4b)

Thus participants described that through exposure and awareness of diversity at BSSDAC, members had opportunity to adapt. Comments suggested that adapting to racial diversity contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

BSSDAC portrayed an Openness to Change. Participants described how members embraced native languages in worship services and music, in addition to

facilitating translation of services. They noted members' acceptance of diversity revealed by embracing racially diverse people. They illustrated how adapting to diversity included adjusting to ethnic foods and cultural differences in worship. Thus for focus group participants, Openness to Change contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

Focus Group Results Part 2

The previous section considered the perceived elements that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation. The ways this multiracial reality manifested themselves were seen in the four major themes with corresponding sub-themes that emerged from the local church leaders' and church members' perceptions revealed in the discussions from the two-focus group. These themes hinted at links between racial diversity and multiracial church growth.

The purpose of this section is to make this link between racial diversity and church growth more visible and give voice to the focus group participants regarding how the multiracial reality was perceived to help or hinder church growth. It reports the answers to my third research question: How has the emerging racial diversity of BSSDAC contributed or hindered the growth of the church from the perspective of church leaders and members? This section was guided by specific focus group leading questions that asked the participant to share if they perceived implications or influences between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC: Describe what relationship (if any) you see between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC? Describe the influence (if any) of racial diversity on church growth?

The ways this multiracial reality contributed to the growth of the church were seen in two major themes with corresponding sub-themes that emerged from the local church leaders' and church members' perceptions revealed in the discussions from the two-focus group. These themes further explained the perceived link between racial diversity and multiracial church growth. The two themes and sub-themes were:

1. Attracted by Diversity and sub-themes such as return of former members, welcomed, accepted
2. Benefits of Diversity and sub-themes such as, inclusion, racism undermined, spiritual growth

I have organized the key responses from focus group participants according to themes regarding the perceived relationship/ influence of racial diversity on church growth.

Attracted by Diversity

Attracted by Diversity was the first of two themes identified. Within this theme participants' comments provide examples that illustrate their perception of a relationship between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC.

Return of Former Members

Participant 8b articulated that the development of racial diversity attracted her to return to BSSDAC, suggesting that racial diversity was beneficial and enriching to the church community, generating growth:

> When you're racially diverse, you bring so much more to the table. So when it comes to church growth with all those ideas, different economics, education, just upbringing, culture, socially, you bring more to the table, you have more to offer. And that's what

> promotes church growth. That's what attracted me. I left the church and I was gone for a long time. Pastor Harlin kept showing up. And when I came back, Suburban wasn't the Suburban that I knew. And to this day, my friends who came to Suburban back then, 'Why are you going there?' And when I tell them about the change, and they come and they come to visit. So the more racially diverse we are, the more ideas we have. And that promotes church growth.

A similar experience surfaced in the dialogue between Participant 1a and Participant 10a, who described the racial diversity in BSSDAC as part of the attraction that influenced his return to BSSDAC:

> Participant 10a: When I first came back, I walked through the door and I was like, I said it was different languages and different people and different colors and that made me stay a while.
>
> Participant 1a: … you're used to mingle with-
>
> Participant 10a: Yeah I like diversity.
>
> Participant 1a: With colleagues and buddies from-
>
> Participant 10a: All over the planet. I got friends all over the world. If I fly somewhere I can stay on somebody's couch very well. All different colors and languages and that's what I prefer.

Similarly, Participant 8b, a Black female, shared that the development of greater racial diversity among church members specifically influenced her along with her family to return to BSSDAC:

> I know for me and my family [pause] because me, [name of church member], and quite a few of us, we had left the church. And Pastor Harlin used to show up everywhere; family picnics at our homes, everywhere. And so we said, 'Well, let's check him out.' And Buffalo Suburban had changed since the last time I had been. And it was the diversity that attracted us to come back.

Participants suggested that racial diversity influenced the return of former members to return to BSSDAC and thus racial diversity positively influenced the growth of BSSDAC.

Welcomed

For Participant 2b a racially diverse church is more welcoming: racially diverse members are attracted to other racially diverse individuals.

> Whatever their origin, I think, in my own opinion, that a church is more interesting and more welcoming when it's diverse because people can maybe see themselves in that church because they can see someone from their cultural background in the church or they can say, 'Well, there's no one just like me, but look at all the diversity. It must be okay for someone to be [pause].' Versus the church that's homogeneous, and you're not like that group. You might feel like, 'They seem warm enough, but there's nobody like me there.'

Diversity was specifically identified as a key in attracting people to BSSDAC:

> I think that diversity is a marketing tool. It can be used as that. The doorway is not open this wide, [with hand gestures widening- it's open this wide]. From the outside look at it as if I'm not a member of the church, but I'm inviting you to church and if you can see, if it was glass and you could look inside of that church, and it's diverse. You see people that look like your people gravitate to people that look like them at first. And then once you get in and you meet people that don't look like you that welcome you just like the people that look like you, you'll probably stay. And stay a long time. Everyone gets along. They're all pretty much in this church. We all work together. It is not just skin color, it's age, sex. We all work together in a lot of different projects. That's something special about the church. (Participant 10a)

This participant observed a progressive dynamic in which people initially connected with people of the same race but subsequently developed interracial connections after being welcomed by racially different people in the same way as by those that were racially the same. Thus participants suggested that being welcomed in the diverse environment of BSSDAC illustrates how racial diversity positively influenced the growth of BSSDAC.

Accepted

Another sub-theme of being Attracted by Diversity was feeling accepted. Participant 3a, a Black church member, shared an experience that illustrated this:

> I recently brought somebody to church who's been asking me about this church. Visibility part has something to do with it. But also that person knowing me has something to do with it. And one of the things that he asked me before he came is, 'What is the racial makeup of your church?' I said, 'We're so many, you don't feel uncomfortable going to a not Black church.' He was a White guy. He laughed, he said, 'I prefer a more diverse environment because,' he said, 'I think that's the way God is and that's the way heaven is gonna be.' This man is not a Christian … But he's looking for a diverse environment because he is thinking in terms of what is God like. And I think that a lot of people think that way. It makes sense. And what we see happening at our society is racism, in our current society right now. So many things that I had to deal with back in the '60s are being reversed right now. And people are looking for something different. They're looking for a better God. And so diversity gives people a vision of what God is like. Accepting of all people regardless of what they look like or where they came from. And I believe heaven is going to be that way. People who are not Christians are thinking that way.

For Participant 3a an environment of racial acceptance influences church growth. When asked if racial diversity influenced church growth, Participant 2b responded that exposure to different races in BSSDAC helped members overcome judgmental attitudes, thus growth in racial diversity at BSSDAC facilitated a growth in acceptance of racial diversity by church members:

> And so I think they learn to be more accepting because of the influx of culturally different [pause] in large numbers. I think my own subjective perception is at whatever level of judgementalist. And we had it lowered after we had the large influx of diverse people because I think we said, 'That's not fair.'

Several participants saw evidence of the positive influence of racial diversity on church growth, in the reactions of people being accepted in BSSDAC despite racial differences. When asked: "But you think there is a relationship between the diversity of the church and the growth of the church?" Participant 10a responded, "Yes it is." Participants responded to the question "Describe what relationship, if any, you see between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC?" Participant 4b answered "I think there has to be." Furthermore, Participant 5b replied:

> Just being accepting of each other makes the growth [pause] because you're accepted somewhere. You're in a community. You feel, 'I belong somewhere. I'm loved where I go. They welcome me. They're there for me.'

In response, Participant 4b further explained:

> It's like when your children get married, now you have a bigger family because now your children, who you love, they love somebody else. Now their family is part of your family. We do the same thing in church.

Furthermore, Participant 9b responded to the question by stating: "I think it can. And in this church it has." Revealed in their responses, for Participants 4b, 5b, and 9b a positive relationship exists between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC.

Participants suggested that being accepted in the diverse environment of BSSDAC illustrates how racial diversity positively influenced the growth of BSSDAC. The return of former members, new people feeling both welcomed and accepted, together contributed to an environment in BSSDAC showing how people were attracted by racial diversity. The participants' perceptions suggest that BSSDAC experienced church growth because people were attracted by diversity.

Benefits of Diversity

The second theme that permeated the discussion were the Benefits of Diversity as related to church growth. Within this theme participants' comments are divided into four sub-themes: inclusion, racism undermined, spiritual growth, and positive influence.

Inclusion

A sub-theme that emerged in the discussion was the inclusion of diverse newcomers into the social life and programming of the church. External racial differences are easily overlooked when there is inclusion with friendship:

> Yeah. It seems natural. You know what I mean? It might seem different on the outside, but here they're just loving people that are your good friends. It doesn't matter . . . what color of people's skin are. So if that's modeled, if you see people … and they're all involved like they're everybody else. People see that, so then they're comfortable with, 'Oh, I see that here in this church' … they accept that, okay, well we can be the same.' (Participant 4b)

When asked if involvement of racially diverse groups influenced church growth, Participant 7a responded:

> Yeah, I would say so. I'd say that it has. For the people who were from outside, when they came and felt like they're getting involved. Being asked to lead a song service in your language. And the whole church would participate in it. I believe that that enabled or helped them in a way to feel welcome and stay.

When asked: "What relationship, if any, do you see between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC?" Participant 2b noted that the BSSDAC community grew more inclusive as it grew in racial diversity:

> I think that the increasing diversity has just helped us all of all different cultural backgrounds have positive experiences with each other. And then, to realize the importance of being inclusive in the way we operate the church service, but also the way we function as a community of faith. I think we've added to our ability to do that because of having the experiences.

Through inclusion of racial diversity BSSDAC essentially developed a wider sociographic area to draw from and multiplied the pool of people to potentially evangelize and bring into the church:

> We've kind of all talked a little bit about it because if you have one group of people: you have White, 30 to 50 year-olds in the church, if you have that, it's going to be much different to get growth than if you have four or five different nationalities in that church. You only have to effect like in your own group, you only have one or two that can bring in more for the whole group. You know what I mean? When you have different groups, I think it's easier to bring in people, because people are reaching the different people that live in different places. Some people only can reach the people in their neighborhood. Well, if everyone lives in the same neighborhood, you only have so many people. But if you're living in ten different neighborhoods, then you'll impact a lot of different lives. That's kind of what you have here is you have people, all parts of the city coming in here. (Participant 4b)

Thus participants suggested that inclusion of racially diverse people into BSSDAC reveals the positive relationship between racial diversity and the growth of BSSDAC.

Racism Undermined

Focus group Participant 3b noted that as inclusion and racial diversity became normal within BSSDAC this norm was perceived to undermine racism:

> And I also say that this is what has become the norm for us. It's not the norm outside of here. There's racism, it's rampant. Division is greater I think today than it [pause] it's bad as it's ever been. I mean, watch the news. And I've become more sensitive when I hear someone that I work with or whatever that will make a comment that is racist or they may not think it is, but I'm personally offended because I have very personal friends who are of different races and they've offended me because they've said something derogatory about their race.

Additionally, Participant 2b commented: "Your coworkers have offended [you] because [they] insulted someone else." Participant 3b affirmed, "Yeah... True. They're friends." Thus participants suggested that racism is undermined in an environment that sees racial diversity as a benefit. In turn this illustrates how racial diversity positively influenced the growth of BSSDAC.

Spiritual Growth

Another sub-theme in the Benefits of Diversity theme was that of spiritual growth. One of the participants felt that the acceptance of racial diversity cultivated a spiritual maturity in the church:

> I think it has cultivated a spiritual maturity that we wouldn't have had without it. By seeing people who are different than we are in the cultural background and not just seeing them out there, but seeing them in here, and then I think that that's been helpful for us. My own sense is that the congregation became a more accepting, inclusive congregation, as a group, as a result of having a more diverse attendees. (Participant 2b)

But did such diversity contribute to church growth? Many participants felt that there was such a relationship. Participant 5a saw the link as a spiritual dimension:

> I think it contributes to church growth because you're not focusing internally on who's there and that they fit a certain mode. There is no mode to fit. It better prepares us for the second coming because everybody, it's not one particular race that's going to be saved. It allows people to become more loving and accept[ing]. People are more spiritual and happy. They're willing to share their message with anybody.

Participant 2b expanded on that view by pointing out that diversity brought wisdom, provided different perspectives, and generated variety of thinking, which together enhanced spirituality through diversity:

> I have learned in my life that a group of people is wiser when they don't all come from the same background. They think collectively in a superior way than if they were all from the same cultural perspective. Because that diversity challenges thinking and it enriches the quality of thought among the group. And I think the spiritual life of a group benefits in much the same way when there's diversity that the collective spiritual experience is a higher quality experience and more appealing because of that richness that comes from some of that diversity adding to the quality. I think it adds. I don't think it subtracts anything. I think it adds.

Participant 8b spoke of racial differences as a challenge to preconceived ideas and as a preparatory step for spiritual growth:

> I think it also challenges our preconceived ideas. And our idea of God and our relationship with Him grows because of the differences in the people … the godly people around us. And when you have a spirit for growth, you have [a] church growth. And you're challenged spiritually with differences in godly people.

Reflecting on the wholistic nature of growth Participant 2b noted that experiences with racial diversity in BSSDAC generated growth in both cultural competence and spiritual maturity:

> So there's a growth in numbers, but there can be growth in [pause]. There's a term that people in my field call cultural competence. And that's the competence of being able to interact with people in different cultures, and you to be comfortable and for them to be comfortable, not this awkward kind of communication or fear across cultural gaps. And so I think Buffalo Suburban, as a group, became more culturally competent over the past 10 years because we had the diversity. And so I think that was good for us.

> When I say good for us, I mean it helped us as a congregation to become more [pause]. I think it's a form of spiritual maturity to be able to interact with people who are culturally different than you, and everyone to be comfortable together rather than saying there's something here [pause] 'I think it'd be better if we didn't have this heterogeneity', because there may be some people who just want cultural sameness. But this congregation doesn't seem at this point to desire cultural sameness. We are comfortable with diversity. And that seems like a really kind of growth thing that has happened to us. Maturity growth.

Thus participants suggested that spiritual maturity was an area of growth that resulted as a benefit of racial diversity in BSSDAC.

Participants suggested benefits of diversity as illustrated by inclusion of racially diverse individuals, racism being undermined, and spiritual growth of members. Thus the diverse environment of BSSDAC illustrates how racial diversity positively influenced the growth of BSSDAC. The participants' perceptions suggest that BSSDAC experienced church growth because people benefitted by diversity.

Thus according to focus group participants, both former members and new visitors were attracted to BSSDAC because of the racial diversity. The presence of racial diversity actually made people feel welcomed and accepted which facilitated relationships among racially different individuals. These bonds of friendship provided a feeling of inclusion, overcame barriers and division and perhaps even challenged racism. The growth in racial diversity influenced a simultaneous growth in acceptance, inclusion, spiritual maturity, and cultural competence and ultimately contributed to more members joining BSSDAC.

Metaphors

In each focus group, participants were asked to give a metaphor that would capture what they perceived to be the essence of the influence between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC. Metaphors allowed people to capture the essence of

their experience in a multiracial church in a more holistic way. The metaphors they put forth included: food, wind, flowers, birds, bread, candy, Pentecost, heaven, and lake.

Participant 9b used the metaphor, "food," where racial diversity is tied to the different nutritional elements in food: "Food to the body. Different types of food. Proteins, carbohydrates…" Participant 4b captured this essence though a metaphor highlighting a yearly event hosted at BSSDAC where cultural differences are celebrated and shared: "The International Food Day, the different things that we need." Participant 2b noted: "I was going to say wind. How wind refreshes us, it invigorates us. It brings fresh air to us." In the view of Participant 7b, the metaphors "fresh flowers," "birds," and "variety is the spice of life" suggested an appreciation of diversity:

> You know the saying 'Variety is the spice of life.' Variety in anything. And God didn't make all the flowers the same color and the same shape. They're all different, and they're all beautiful. A lot of them can smell really nice, but they all have different smells. And we enjoy them all. Birds, all different, different songs, but they're all beautiful. So people, we're all different. Even individuals within a certain 'racial group' or whatever. So we can appreciate the variety that these different groups have to bring… culture kind of tends to come along with just ... they look different. . . . But a lot of times that means they came from a certain area and they have a certain culture that's different, and it's interesting. And it's intriguing because it's not the same thing you're accustomed to.

Participant 9b gave the metaphor "bread" showing although people from other races have different appearances, all enhanced the growth of BSSDAC:

> Kind of like bread… Everybody makes bread but they make it differently. You go to different cultures and they give you their kind of bread, doesn't look anything like the wonder bread that's White sliced. Okay. And oftentimes it's far better. But it feeds us all. And we can all understand and relate to the metaphors in the Bible of the bread.

Participant 6a expressed: A "bowl of candy and they're all wrapped in different colors, it doesn't matter what colors they're wrapped in, they're all good." In the metaphor "bowl of candy" racial diversity was illustrated by the different colored candy

wrappers. The wrappers were not the focus, the significant thing was the candy inside that was good. The racially diverse church members at BSSDAC are "wrapped in different colors," different external appearances. They fill the "bowl of candy," the church. Inside these different "wrappers" they are all "good" people. Participant 3a used the metaphor of Pentecost to explain how it felt to witness the inclusion of multiple languages:

> Yeah when the Holy Spirit came down, that's how it was. It was like that. I'm telling you when I came into the church and it was like fire existed for languages being spoken. It was amazing.

One participant described the experience of people at BSSDAC fellowshipping together amidst racial diversity a foretaste of heaven:

> It feels like we're a step closer to what heaven will be like for all of us. We can fellowship with acceptance and respect and fondness for one another. And certainly heaven is going to be like the most amazing reunion of believers. So we can have a taste of that here. (Participant 2b)

This metaphor of heaven describes the interaction among racially diverse individuals at BSSDAC using the words: "acceptance, respect, and fondness," suggesting something deeper than a mere tolerance. Participant 2a specifically underlined that heaven has no boundaries, no limits, no restrictions: "Heaven. What [is] heaven gonna be like? It's not just going to be one color in heaven. It's gonna be a whole bunch of different colors." The metaphor "heaven" is used by both Participant 2b and 2a to show the positive interaction and dynamic among the racially diverse members at BSSDAC was reflective of what heaven will be like. Participant 6b utilized the metaphor "lake" showing BSSDAC open to anyone, a place where people flowed:

> I think one is kind of like some kind of a lake that's like kind of at a low spot. So when it rains, all these kind of random streams just kind of ended up coming into it. And I think Buffalo Suburban, it's pretty old, it's still stable, it's safe. But it's just this

> place that I think kind of collects people who are either looking for a place or in need of help or something. It's just kind of there as reservoirs. People kind of stream into it I guess.

The metaphor of a lake suggests that just as water from smaller streams empty their water into a lake, increasing its size; racially different people groups streamed into BSSDAC, increasing its size. Each stream had a different path it followed to get to the lake, as such the racially different people all came from a different cultural experience. Water from each stream merged together into water of the same lake. As such the racially different people merged together to form one church body. If the inflow of water was limited to one stream, wouldn't it limit the growth of the lake? As such, if BSSDAC was unwilling to accept racially different people, wouldn't it have limited the growth of the church.

The metaphors captured the essence of the influence between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC: contributed, celebrated, appreciated, emphasized, invigorated, refreshed, received, accepted, filled. They showed how comfortable the church leaders became with the multiracial reality of the church. They suggested a positive influence between racial diversity and church growth at BSSDAC.

The discussion also turned out a cautionary note. According to Participant 7a, an African immigrant, BSSDAC still had ample room to grow in its cultural competence:

> I will say that we are doing better, but we can still improve. The reason why … is even currently if we say we have African immigrants for instance, I don't think as a church we understand really the representation of these Africans. They're not one thing. These Africans, most people will say they speak Swahili. Very few will speak Swahili. These are people who have come from different countries and different ethnic groups with their own different languages. Even within them they don't understand each other. But we don't know that. For me for instance, of course I'm from Africa but I'm not able to understand most of them. I can communicate to maybe 10 people just in Swahili if they know Swahili. Then from me they can also translate to the others on their own language. The majority speak Kinyarwanda. I

> don't speak Kinyarwanda. As a church I don't think we understand that and that's what I'm saying we can do better. You asked, do we reflect? I would say yeah, we reflect what is currently happening in the country but we need to educate ourselves more to be ready. To know that even if you see these are Africans, they're not all the same. Africa is a continent and within a country, I am from Kenya but it has 42 languages spoken.

For Participant 7a, BSSDAC still needed a learning and growth posture in its response to racial diversity. Although the church was open to changes regarding language accommodation and translation, in relation to language diversity, there was room to grow more.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings of document analysis and focus groups I conducted at the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church. Each of its three sections answers one of my three research questions. BSSDAC started as a White congregation in Buffalo in 1885, and later moved to the suburbs in the 1980s. About 20 years later as Buffalo neighborhoods assimilated refugees, the pastor and lay leaders opened the church doors for membership to become diverse. The 2019 year-end membership revealed BSSDAC as a growing multiracial church. The ways this multiracial reality manifested themselves were seen in the four major themes with corresponding sub-themes that emerged from the focus group discussions: Church Leaders, Worship, Commitment to People, and Openness to Change. The focus group participants also suggested a positive link between racial diversity and church growth as revealed in the themes: Attracted by Diversity and Benefits of Diversity with their corresponding sub-themes.

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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The growth of racially diverse churches has not been a well-researched phenomenon. Traditionally, church growth advocates advised churches to use racially segmented strategies for growth (Wagner, 2010). As most regions of the United States are becoming more racially diverse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, 2015) an increasing number of churches have begun to experiment with more racially diverse forms of outreach (DeYmaz, 2020a; Dougherty, 2003; Minatrea, 2004; Stetzer & Putman, 2006; Woo, 2009). Still, the literature on multiracial churches, church growth in the context of the multiracial church is still a developing perspective. To shed more light on this problem, this study explored the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC) in Lancaster, New York.

Research Design

I used the case study approach to shed light on the transformation of a predominantly White church into a multiracial church and analyze the factors of its growth. I first examined historic documents to reconstruct the history of the church. I also reviewed church membership records to analyze the growth rate and racial composition of BSSDAC. Then I used a purposive sample of lay leaders chosen for their reputation as trusted leaders and their ability to remember the history of the church to

conduct two focus groups of eight leaders to probe for the influences that led to the remarkable transformation of this relatively homogenous congregation into a multiracial church that has experienced significant growth over the last few years.

What guided this research were two lenses. One the one hand, there is the traditional church growth lens that points out that multiracial churches are difficult to grow (see (Gibbs, 1986; McGavran, 1970; McIntosh, 2004; Towns, 1995; Wagner, 1979, 1993; Zackrison, 1997). On the other, sociologists like Emerson (2008) indicate that the increase of racial diversity in the United States is impacting churches and leading to new experiments in racial diversity. An Adventist leader contributing to our understanding of multicultural congregations within the Seventh-day Adventist church was James Zackrison (1990) who noted that many so-called White churches were actually turning multicultural. This study seeks to contribute knowledge about the growth of such multiracial congregations.

Findings

The findings of this study answered three supporting research questions. The first section sought to answer the question: How did BSSDAC become a racially mixed congregation?

The First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Buffalo was organized in November of 1885 (Barczak, 1968). In 1982 the church moved to its current location in Lancaster, NY, (Young, 1983) where it also acquired its current name: Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDAC). Although traditionally a White monoracial church, through a multifactorial process that started in the 1980s and solidified within the last 12 years, BSSDAC became a statistically growing multiracial church. Despite the nearly

monoracial immediate surroundings of Lancaster, a suburb of Buffalo, BSSDAC became multiracial, reflecting racially diverse Buffalo City. The majority of racially different members were refugees from Burma and Africa that immigrated to Buffalo City during this time. Statistical calculations of membership 2008-2019 revealed an average annual growth rate (AAGR) of 7.64%, qualifying BSSDAC as a growing church. The 2019 year-end membership totaled 575 and was comprised of 222 White, 154 Black/African American, 128 Asian, 9 Two or More Races, 32 Other, and 30 Hispanic (see Figure 2, chapter one). This racial make-up of members confirmed that BSSDAC was a multiracial congregation following the 80/20 criterium.

Multiracialism developed in BSSDAC as an intentional response to changing realities. The historically White monoracial church experienced an intentional transition toward diversity in the 1980s, with initial changes in music and worship style. This resulted in the first non-White church members joining BSSDAC and church leaders being confronted with change. The leaders of the congregation navigated conflict with those members that were not receptive to diversity, taking an intentional stance on racial inclusion, and committing the church to be accepting of racial diversity.

Change was solidified and expanded under the leadership of pastors and lay leaders with a vision of change. In response to immigration of Karen and African refugees to Buffalo, BSSDAC opened its doors to greater diversity with acceptance of new music, languages, and translation. Resources were provided including transportation to worship services. Relationships and connections formed between racially different church members. Newcomers were embraced and incorporated, and BSSDAC became a

multiracial church. Multiracialism became the new normal for BSSDAC. Church leaders identified BSSDAC as a multiracial church with a multiracial vision.

By the time I became the pastor of BSSDAC the church had a mature multiracial identity. When I was interviewed as a pastoral candidate in 2015, I was told that BSSDAC needed a pastor with a multiracial vision. Lay leaders articulated that they desired a pastor that had both interest and commitment to working with a multiracial church. Since 2015, I witnessed how BSSDAC leaders embrace a multiracial church identity.

The second question shed light on the perceived elements (principles, factors) that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation from the perspective of church leaders and members. Four major themes emerged from analysis of the focus group discussions: Church Leaders, Worship, Commitment to People, and Openness to Change.

The Church Leaders theme revealed the crucial role of the pastor in facilitating the entrance of racially diverse individuals into the church. It also highlighted the willingness of lay leaders to accept and embrace this racial diversity and share their positions and ministries with lay leaders of other races and backgrounds. This leader-modeled openness to racial diversity was perceived as one of the factors contributing to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation. Participants identified the open-mindedness of Pastor Harlin as instrumental in facilitating transition and intentionally embracing racial diversity. They also pointed out the inclusivity of lay leaders and the definitive stance the lay leaders took to make BSSDAC open to racial diversity and oppose discrimination. Thus Participant comments from both focus groups supported the

Church Leaders Theme with its sub-themes: Open-mindedness of pastor and Inclusivity of lay leaders.

The second theme emerging from the data was Worship. The inclusive worship experience embraced diversity in language, music style, and participation, contributing to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation. Participants pointed out that church members accepted the transition from a traditional service to a variety of worship styles, embracing different music, worship styles, and languages. They suggested the inclusive and diverse worship experience encouraged participation from different racial groups and promoted a sense of belonging. Thus Participant comments from both focus groups supported the Worship Theme with its sub-themes: Transition from traditional to a variety of worship styles and diversity in music and language.

A third theme focus group participants brought us was Commitment to People, revealed in the efforts of the church members to build genuine relationships and attend to the needs of those who were checking out the church and who were different than the existing membership. BSSDAC invested resources to meet physical needs such as providing transportation, clothes, and food, which connected BSSDAC with racially diverse immigrants. Welcoming and incorporating racially diverse individuals into the fellowship, while fostering relationships among different racial groups through church ministries and social activities made it easier for people of different races to feel at home in BSSDAC and thus contributed to the continued growth toward a racially diverse congregation. The location of BSSDAC being accessible, visible, and convenient also favored racially diverse growth. Participants suggested that the location being accessible and visible influenced people coming to church. They noted that although the immediate

suburban community around BSSDAC was predominantly White, BSSDAC attracted people that were part of Buffalo City which had a much greater racial diversity. Thus Participant comments from both focus groups supported the Commitment to People Theme with its sub-themes: Utilization of material resources, welcoming into the church community, forming relationships, and church location.

A fourth theme, Openness to Change, was identified as supporting the growth of the church among new racial groups. BSSDAC revealed this willingness to change by embracing and incorporating diversity in language, both in language inclusion and provision of translation. BSSDAC demonstrated an acceptance of racial diversity by making changes that created an environment where diversity was accepted. BSSDAC also demonstrated elements of adapting to cultural differences. Thus Participant comments from both focus groups supported the Openness to Change Theme with its sub-themes: Language inclusion and translation, acceptance of racial diversity, and adapting to cultural differences.

The focus groups were also asked to reflect on more specific ways how the emerging racial diversity of BSSDAC had contributed or hindered the growth of the church? Local church leaders and members of the focus group discussions pointed to several ways racial diversity in BSSDAC contributed to church growth. These findings were reported in two themes: Attracted by Diversity and Benefits of Diversity.

Within the first theme, Attracted by Diversity, three subthemes were seen: Return of Former Members, Welcomed, and Accepted. Participants noted that through embracing racial diversity some inactive church members were drawn back. Then there was the welcome factor in displaying racial diversity as part of an intentional strategy.

This strategy allowed BSSDAC to be an attraction to a greater pool of people. The presence of racial diversity fostered interracial friendships and acceptance which brought people into the church.

The second theme that arose was the Benefits of Diversity with its sub-themes: Inclusion, Racism Undermined, and Spiritual Growth. Participants noted how racially diverse people were included into the workings and fellowship of the church. However, this did not happen without intentional conversations to overcome racial divisions and barriers. Racism had to be challenged. These intentional conversations cleared the way to create more opportunities for involvement of racially different people, signaling that BSSDAC was a place for diverse people to grow, and even facilitating the spiritual growth of the church body. As racial diversity and inclusion became the new normal within BSSDAC it experienced simultaneous growth in church size, in structural diversification, in attitudes of acceptance, and inclusion, in spiritual maturity, and cultural competence. Racial diversity took away predictable norms and generated an attitude of openness and acceptance. While the perceptions expressed by church leaders and members in the focus group discussions suggest that they were proud of these developments as a growing church, it was also clear that they wanted BSSDAC to continue its journey of growth as a truly multiracial community.

I also asked focus group members to find metaphors to describe their experience as a multiracial church. The metaphors shared by church members and leaders capture the essence of the perceived influence between racial diversity and church growth. They spoke of the church community as food consisting of vital nutrients, different groups of flowers creating a potpourri of colors, the ingredients of a delicious loaf of bread, a bowl

of candy in different wrappers, and a lake being fed by different brooks and streams. Some even pointed to Pentecost where God himself reached out to a multilingual community to bring home the Gospel in the heart language of each people. These metaphors showed how comfortable the leaders became with the multiracial reality of the church and revealed that church leaders and members perceived BSSDAC as a place supporting racially diverse church growth. As a lake is always open to receive the rainwater coming down in streams so BSSDAC is determined to be open to all racial groups, and committed to ministering and growing in this way.

Discussion

This case study contributes insights to the growing literature on multiracial churches by exploring the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the context of a church that started out as a White church but became a multiracial congregation. It also wrestled with the issue if racial diversity attracts new members or creates barriers. For the focus group members of this study who experienced the transition of the church and witnessed its growth, racial diversity not only attracted new members to BSSDAC, it also brought former members back who valued the intentional shift of the church towards racial diversity. BSSDAC is one of the churches that experienced what Garces-Foley (2011) or Emerson (2008) describe as a shift in attitudes toward racial diversity in the United States. In order to grow, BSSDAC became a church that experimented intentionally with a more racially diverse form of outreach and church life (DeYmaz, 2020a; Dougherty, 2003; Minatrea, 2004; Woo, 2009).

This study confirms what church growth experts have long emphasized, namely that even if the demographics of a community changes, growth among new demographic

groups is not an automatic result (Guest, 1989; Hadaway, 1981; Walrath, 1979). As the nearby community demographics were changing, it took the intentionality of Pastor Harlin and other leaders to make the growing diversity of Buffalo City a focus for the development of BSSDAC. Thus leadership turned out to be a major theme discussed in the focus groups. The data did not identify a list of leadership qualities needed, but rather identified the key role of church leaders in dealing with the diversity issue as influencing church growth, calling for leaders who are ready to "meet the requirement of the situation" (Gibbs, 1986, p. 11). Leaders in BSSDAC promoted a sense of community and belonging in church (Elkington, 2011). It was this type of intentional leadership that helped the church overcome potential barriers to growth. Culturally competent interactions and racially sensitive expression had to be learned.

One barrier to growth was racial discrimination. Early in the transition, the BSSDAC church board took an intentional position of non-tolerance for racial discrimination. An intentional promotion of fellowship among the members of different races and facing issues such as overcoming prejudice among members resulted in racially diverse church growth in BSSDAC. These dynamics are often reported by authors dealing with multiracial churches (Christerson et al., 2005; DeYmaz, 2020a; DeYoung et al., 2004; Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Emerson, 2006; Garces-Foley, 2011; Marti, 2005). The lay leadership team of BSSDAC incorporated racially diverse leaders concurrently with the emerging racial diversity of church members, allowing newcomers to understand that different backgrounds and races were welcome. The local leaders' responses toward racial discrimination and their inclusion of racially diverse leaders into the leadership team suggest the development of culturally sensitive leadership.

Another barrier the church growth literature identifies as a double-strength cross-cultural barrier: it not only is the barrier between belief and unbelief but a barrier consisting of a cultural identity difference in those that the church wants to reach. There are worldview and language differences to overcome. That is why church growth experts call for E-2/E-3 evangelism strategies, that is evangelism strategies that address the cultural, the language, as well as the spiritual differences (Towns et al., 1998). BSSDAC pastors demonstrated a kind of leadership that responded to these challenges when they intentionally created a vision of an inclusive church where everyone was welcome and worked on bridging strategies. In the 1980s, Pastor Giller opened the worship service to diversity. More recently between 2008-2014, Pastor Harlin focused on social outreach to racially diverse immigrants. When I interviewed at BSSDAC as a pastoral candidate in the fall of 2015, the lay leadership team made it clear to me that BSSDAC was a multiracial congregation. The creation of congregational structures that accommodated people who were so culturally different that it necessitated translation indicates that E-2/E-3 strategies were employed to integrate them into the congregation. Pastors and lay leaders modeled interactions with racially diverse people and acceptance of differences in BSSDAC. Thus the role of intentional pastoral and lay leadership as a vital element to church growth was not a surprise, but aligns with what scholars have observed before (Emery, 1979; Gibbs, 2000; McKinney, 1979; Zackrison, 1997). This study underlines that this role is even more crucial in racially diverse churches.

Although in this dissertation race is the focus, it is necessary to acknowledge that race is just one aspect of culture. Through the transition of BSSDAC from a monoracial to a multiracial church, BSSDAC actually developed a new inclusive culture in order to

be attractive to people of different races. Dhingra (2004) articulates the cultural implications in the transition into a multiracial congregation that BSSDAC experienced in developing a new cultural identity:

> While multiculturalism and color blindness appear at odds, for the former draws attention to group differences and the latter suggests ignoring them, they actually fit together in their approach to race. Both suggest that the best way to overcome racial differences is through celebrating groups' cultures equally while ignoring differences in groups' access to privileges. (Dhingra, 2004, p. 376)

Pre-empting the cultural transition, BSSDAC leaders targeted the concept of racial discrimination by openly addressing this in the church board and formalizing the position of BSSDAC being not only tolerant but accepting of racial and cultural diversity and openly stating this to the congregation. The new cultural identity in BSSDAC confirms the concept of Pollard (2009), who suggests that the gospel creates a primary identity that overcomes racial divisions.

The process of BSSDAC adopting a new inclusive culture necessitated change. Furthermore, culturally competent interactions and racially sensitive expression had to be learned. In BSSDAC this was a process for the pastors and church leaders, along with the members. Development of cultural intelligence in leadership at BSSDAC was necessary to promote fellowship and integration among racially and culturally diverse members (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Foster & Brelsford, 1996; Garces-Foley, 2011; J. J. Lewis, 2008) and to deal with conflicts and avoid the issue of generalization and stereotyping (DeYmaz, 2020a).

BSSDAC embraced different cultural aspects encompassing language differences, dress styles and food preferences. Language differences were accommodated through Sabbath schools discussion groups created for different language groups, special music

performed in different languages and cultural styles, and the use of different languages and translation in worship services. Group potlucks were hosted featuring ethnic foods. People were welcomed to services in their cultural dress. Appreciation of cultural uniqueness was even celebrated at BSSDAC through a yearly cultural festival. At BSSDAC racial and cultural diversity has been promoted as the normal, such that people say it is what they now expect, look for, want, and even a reason why some state they bring friends to church.

BSSDAC essentially adopted a new culture in the process of becoming a multiracial church. Reflected in a comment by a church leader, Participant 2b, "But this congregation doesn't seem at this point to desire cultural sameness. We are comfortable with diversity. And that seems like a really kind of growth thing that has happened to us. Maturity growth." Likewise, it may be expected that another church that goes the route of becoming a multiracial community would have to work through this new cultural balance within their context.

The findings from this case study seem to show a way beyond the so-called homogenous unit principle advocated by American church growth author, Peter Wagner (1979) who considered both pastoral leadership and homogeneous units as fundamental to church growth. Wagner emphasized homogeneous units:

> Thus, while there are churches that include people from more than one homogeneous unit, they are few in number across the board and have a more difficult time growing than do homogeneous unit churches. (pp. 277-278)

For many years the church growth movement has maintained that homogeneous church growth seems to be a fact for most growing churches (Gibbs, 1986; McGavran, 1970; McIntosh, 2004; Towns, 1995; Wagner, 1979, 1993; Zackrison, 1997). However

the data of this case study put the emphasis on traditional homogeneous units into a different perspective. Church members perceived that racial diversity in BSSDAC allowed individuals that entered the church from different racial backgrounds to see that they were welcome. For some of its new members a homogeneous church would actually make them feel un-welcomed and they would not stay.

The multiracial growth at BSSDAC seems to support Gibbs (2000) argument against Wagner that suggests that in some circumstances the homogeneous unit may be an inadequate approach to church growth. Gibbs argues that sometimes there is a dynamic interaction between homogeneous and heterogeneous circumstances, with a reciprocal influence between them:

> A church that identifies exclusively with one group may live a self-centered, impoverished life. If that group dwindles, so the church will face extinction. Furthermore, given the high population density and high level of heterogeneity in many urban areas, for a church to run exclusively on homogeneous lines may result in the spiritual isolation and exclusion of the majority of the surrounding population. (p. 128)

Although not supporting the traditional concept of homogeneous units, the data of this case study affirmed Wagner (1979) about the need for intentional leadership which seems to be a crucial factor in making it possible for churches to grow in multiracial environments (DeYmaz, 2020a; DeYmaz & Li, 2010; Yancey, 2003; Zackrison, 1993).

Another theme that was prominent was the inclusive and diverse worship experience which emerged as a factor contributing to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation, especially the issue of music. In many churches music tends to be a contentious topic. Without the intentional acceptance and open response of BSSDAC leaders to different music styles, diversity could have proven a barrier and actually prevented growth. The transition of the worship experience at BSSDAC from

traditional to inclusive to reflect the diversity of participants in language, type of music, and religious rituals including music, singing, and prayer is one of the things BSSDAC has in common with other multiracial churches (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Edwards, 2008; Jenkins, 2003). Worship has consistently been identified as a church growth principle by church growth experts (Gibbs, 1986; Parker, 1979). At the same time sociologists have seen it as an important factor for the communal experience in multiracial congregations (Christerson et al., 2005; DeYoung et al., 2004; Emerson, 2006; Marti, 2005).

This study also sheds some light on a pattern that seems to repeat itself in many neighborhoods. A church experiences a demographic shift in its neighboring community and if it wants to be able to reach that community it has to respond to that change. BSSDAC could see that change taking place in the Buffalo community. But it was only as it was taking that change seriously leading to an intentional change in awareness, attitudes, and even structure, that the social change pattern in its context became a positive force for growth to reach different refugee groups and races. It was this welcoming attitude toward newcomers exhibited in BSSDAC that became a culture or atmosphere of welcomed racial diversity which is seen as one of the key factors in developing a multiracial church (Emery, 1979; Ortiz, 1996; Rusaw & Swanson, 2004). BSSDAC church members suggested that eventually, racial diversity within the church created an opportunity to interact with and accept racially different people, break down preconceived barriers, and in turn to reach out to racial diversity outside of the church.

This finding also supported Stetzer and Putman (2006) who claim that it is up to the church to think of strategies for reaching out and connecting with the racially diverse.

Relationships among racially different individuals is today often a new normal. Tran (2006) has found that many Christian believers embrace the idea of living with a racially diverse group of people. In BSSDAC, bonds of friendship overcame barriers and division and perhaps even challenged racism and race segregation that some feel disintegrates the body of Christ (Woo, 2009) and is detrimental to the church (Minatrea, 2004). At BSSDAC, relationships built among different racial groups through church ministries and social activities helped to overcome barriers to church growth (Towns et al., 1998) with interracial relationships being a factor in the institutionalization of a multiracial church (Yancey, 2003).

One contribution of this study is the documentation of a pattern of demographic transition with a multifaceted response that led to growth. There may be other factors beyond the ones reported in this study that have contributed to the actual growth experienced. But what this study makes clear is the importance of intentionality in response. Although many churches have gone through a similar demographic shift in their context, they may not be growing because they are not able or willing to change in a way that accommodates these new realities. In fact, while this shift required BSSDAC to be willing to invest its resources and to incorporate diversity into its leadership and ministry structures, it started with a shift in attitude, an openness to change which Parker (1997) termed a church growth principle. Bringing racially diverse members together is never easy. For BSSDAC it meant addressing language diversity issues with different methods of translation. It also required growing in acceptance and inclusion, and even in spiritual maturity and cultural competence to work with immigrant groups (Garces-Foley, 2011). It meant superseding stereotypical divisions tied to racial diversity. BSSDAC

acted on the conviction that every person, regardless of his or her race, should be embraced with the Gospel (DeYmaz, 2020a). Are these elements replicable? More studies may be needed to answer this question. But this case study at least hints at some of the elements that are in the power of a congregation facing a multiracial context: openness to change, addressing language inclusion, acceptance of racial diversity, adapting to differences, investing resources, and incorporating diversity in leadership may well be replicable elements for a church transitioning into a multiracial church.

The transition from a monoracial to a multiracial church also meant BSSDAC had to lose or give up some things such as control, predictability, and routine. Leadership roles became shared with racially diverse leaders, thus there was a loss of monoracial control over the church. As worship services expanded in diversity to include more music variety, routine was challenged and some predictability was lost. In the process of language inclusion and accommodation, long-term members gave up their accustomed seating arrangements in the sanctuary. Potlucks lost the focus on just American fare as Asian and African dishes were incorporated. The predominant culture lost its monopoly on church life as diversity was embraced and incorporated in church leadership, activities, worship, and even potlucks. However BSSDAC leaders did not seem to interpret these apparent losses as detrimental to BSSDAC but rather attributed these elements as part of the growth process.

Thus, the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial church was multifactorial as described by Hoge and Roozen (1979) who anticipated my conclusions when they said: "Study after study reaches the same conclusion: There is no single cause or simple pattern of causes related to church growth or decline. Rather, growth or decline involves

a complex pattern of multiple and often interacting factors" (p. 39). Demographics in many neighborhoods continue to change and churches are impacted. Given an intentional strategy to support the transformation of a congregation, this case study allows some optimism that it is possible. Especially if there are leaders that are culturally and emotionally intelligent to take a church through the journey, because it will take major adjustments in leadership, worship, the investment of resources that express true commitment to people who are different and a willingness to give up the ways of a predominant culture.

Conclusions

The findings of this study lead me to a number of conclusions which I hope will be confirmed in other studies.

1. BSSDAC did not start out as a multiracial church. It became a multiracial church in response to shifting demographics paired with intentional multifaceted adaptation that created the potential for growth.

2. In BSSDAC, intentional pastoral leadership created an inclusive leadership environment that drew in members from different backgrounds into the lay leadership and ministry teams. This diversity in lay leadership influenced the ability of BSSDAC to embrace racial diversity. The intentional stance towards racial inclusiveness and diversity contributed to a climate of acceptance and inclusion that resulted in the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

3. In BSSDAC, the worship experience incorporated diversity in language and music, contributing to a climate that fostered participation by racially diverse individuals. Music and language are an expression of the heart. Allowing people of different racial

and cultural backgrounds to actually sing songs that came from their own heart and inviting people from other cultures to learn to appreciate that expression fostered a unique climate of inclusion that contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

4. In BSSDAC, investing resources in meeting physical needs of racially diverse people and facilitating their attendance at BSSDAC by providing transportation contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

5. In BSSDAC, the intentionally welcoming environment drew members from different backgrounds into church activities and ministries, which contributed to a climate favoring the building of relationships among racially diverse individuals. This contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

6. In BSSDAC, a visible and accessible location which made it easier for people residing in communities with greater diversity in nearby Buffalo City to reach BSSDAC, contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

7. In BSSDAC, a deliberate acceptance of diversity and a willingness to adapt to differences along with an intentional position of non-tolerance for racial discrimination created an accepting environment where openness to change and adapting to differences contributed to the growth of BSSDAC as a multiracial congregation.

8. The success of BSSDAC while remarkable cannot be taken for granted in the continuing and often complex challenges of inequality and prejudice in our communities. It is only as BSSDAC continues to learn to be an intentionally inclusive community that it will continue to grow among multiracial realities.

Implications for Practice

On the basis of what I learned in this study, several recommendations for practice emerge. I will outline practical recommendations for local pastors, lay leadership teams of local churches, conference leaders, and leaders responsible for pastoral continuing education.

Local Pastors

1. Pastors need to develop cultural competence and racial acceptance. In today's increasingly diverse society it is important for local pastors to understand and embrace the dynamics of a multiracial church. Elements that may need attention in order to grow a multiracial church include differences in language, culture, and worship style. It may take intentionality to create a welcoming environment where individuals from racially different backgrounds can build relationships, feel accepted, and learn to adapt to differences. A culture of acceptance and non-tolerance for racial discrimination could start with a pastor's deliberate acceptance of racial diversity and personal development of cultural competence.

2. Pastors need to develop strong positional leadership with an inclusive approach to ministry. Strong positional leadership seems significant in shaping and operating a multiracial church. A pastor with commitment for outreach may facilitate the development and growth of a multiracial church. For example, a pastor with a vision for ways to relate with the racial make-up of the population around the church may be the link between a diverse community and the formation of a multiracial church. A culturally competent pastor who embraces racial diversity and an inclusive approach to ministry appears vital in growing a multiracial church.

Lay Leadership Teams of Local Churches

1. Local leadership teams should be created with racially diverse individuals. It appears to be important for lay leadership teams to be accepting of and willing to incorporate diversity in order to facilitate the development and growth of a multiracial church. In order to facilitate unity within diversity, aspects that may need to be negotiated by lay leaders include different worship styles, music styles, and the use of languages. Inclusion of racially different individuals into the lay leadership team could be one way to incorporate diversity and contribute to the integration of other aspects of diversity.

2. Local leaders should be trained to embrace diversity and be decisive against discrimination. It may be necessary for lay leadership teams to be willing to take a clear stance regarding a commitment to diversity. This is significant because the reality of racial discrimination is not excluded from the church setting, and in fact may be magnified within religious circles. In order to facilitate the development of a truly multiracial church, leaders must not tolerate racial discrimination in even the most subtle forms.

Conference Leaders

1. Criteria for hiring pastors should include their preparation to pastor in a multiracial setting. For conference leaders who want to develop and operate multiracial churches, making this a focus with their new pastoral hires could be important. For example, it may be important to consider the intentionality demonstrated by possible pastoral hires for reaching diverse communities. It could also be important to consider

the interest level, training, and commitment that possible pastoral hires have in multiracial churches.

2. Pastors should receive training in cultural competence and multiracial church ministry. It may be useful to facilitate continuing education of all pastoral staff in diversity and cultural competence along with dynamics of multiracial churches. This could ensure that all employed pastors would be trained in cultural sensitivity and aspects of diversity within the church. Capitalizing on the positional leadership of the pastor and focusing training on the pastor could impact the cultural competence of local churches, and potentially the development of multiracial churches.

3. Policy recommendation: all pastoral applicants considered for employment must be able to demonstrate cultural competence.

Leaders Responsible for Pastoral Continuing Education

Material and programs are needed for the development of cultural competence. Leaders responsible for developing materials, seminars, and curriculum for pastoral continuing education should include the development of cultural competence and leadership skills for multiracial churches in their offerings. Having resources developed and available for pastors might facilitate the successful development of multiracial churches.

Recommendations for Further Research

This case study of BSSDAC demonstrates that it is possible for a historically White Seventh-day Adventist church to become a growing multiracial church. It provides insight regarding the perceived factors that contributed to this process. This study is a step forward toward understanding the influence of racial diversity on church

growth. However, this research represents just one case of a growing multiracial Seventh-day Adventist church in Buffalo, New York. It is limited by denomination and location. In order to better understand this phenomenon of growth in multiracial churches, more congregations must be studied across North America. Further research on the dynamics in multiracial churches should be considered.

BSSDAC grew in part because of its openness to work with immigrants and refugees from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. This study focused on the perspective of church leaders. How multiracial churches can serve the needs of specific immigrant communities needs to be understood better also from the perspective of those ministered to.

Additional research is recommended to better understand how and why racial diversity influences community outreach that leads to church growth. As more multiracial churches develop, a study comparing growth among multiracial churches could be considered.

Epilogue

In light of the historical reality of racial division within the Christian church in America and the glaring reality of racial discrimination and a growing distrust against immigrant groups with its manifestations in 21st century American society, it becomes urgent to consider how we respond as Christian leaders. The church seen from God's perspective is clearly intended to include all peoples and races:

> Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." (Revelation 14:6-7 NIV)

As a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, backed by Scriptural and denominational support for the equality of people, racial inclusivity, and multiracial churches, I feel compelled to share the story of BSSDAC in becoming a multiracial church, and the perceived influence of racial diversity on church growth. I believe that multiracial church ministry is part of God's plan. I envision that more church pastors catch the vision of reaching the broader community in ministry. I dream that leadership teams of churches would swing open their doors to racial diversity and make a bold stand for racial inclusivity. I hope that conference leadership will strive to equip their pastors with cultural competence and provide education in multiracial church dynamics, trusting that more leaders will develop a passion to educate widely on multiracial church ministry. As multiracial churches arise and grow I anticipate that the influence of racial diversity on church growth will become better understood.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions

Church Growth

1. Tell me about church growth in BSSDAC over the last ten years?
2. Tell me about what you think has contributed to church growth in BSSDAC over the last ten years?
3. You know that there are different kinds of growth (handout provided). What do you think are the kinds of church growth that BSSDAC is experiencing now?

Racial Diversity

4. Tell me about the racial diversity of BSSDAC?
5. What do you think has contributed to the current racial composition/diversity of BSSDAC?
6. Tell me about the change in racial diversity in BSSDAC over the last ten years?
7. Tell me about how BSSDAC involves members of different racial groups in its leadership, its ministries, and in the life of the church?
8. What impact do you think racial diversity has on BSSDAC?

Racial Diversity and Church Growth

9. Describe what relationship (if any) you see between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC?
10. Describe the influence (if any) of racial diversity on church growth?
11. What metaphor(s) could capture the essence (if any) of the influence/ relationship between racial diversity and church growth in BSSDAC?
12. Can you give an incident, story, description, or compelling experience that illustrates the relationship between racial diversity and church growth of BSSDAC?

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP HANDOUT

Focus Group Handout

The church growth literature suggests 13 growth principles

1. God provides growth
2. Organic and complex/ discover facts
3. Spiritually gifted leadership
4. Pastor
5. Plans and goals
6. Nurture/ edification
7. Outreach/ evangelism
8. Membership mobilized
9. Community ministry/ commitment to people
10. Worship/ structures
11. Openness to change
12. Attitudes/ sacrifice and faithfulness
13. Impacted by origin

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Participant Recruitment

I invited church members verbally to participate in the focus groups. This is the script said to church members to ask them to participate in focus group:

For my dissertation through Andrews University I am conducting a case study to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-Day Adventist Church. I will be holding focus groups with church leaders and church members here at Buffalo Suburban. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

As you may be aware, as part of a research project at Andrews University, I am conducting a case study to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in The Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lancaster, New York. As a way of understanding church leaders' and members' perceptions, I am conducting this focus group. There are no inherent risks or discomforts associated with these procedures.

While there may be no direct benefit to you at this time for participation in this project, we are hopeful that we will learn something that will benefit other pastors and church leaders in their attempt to evangelize multiracial communities in fulfilling the Gospel mission.

This focus group discussion is being audio recorded. However, you can choose whether to remain anonymous in the study, and, in that case, your name will not be used in any publications. You may also choose to have your name used in connection with the statements you make. In addition, you are free to terminate this consent at any time and withdraw from the project without repercussions. If you have questions concerning this project or this consent, please feel free to call Pastor Luis Mancebo at (716) 748-5120, or e-mail me at mancebo@andrews.edu.

I, _____, hereby consent to participate in the project described above. I have read and understand this statement, and:

( ) choose to remain anonymous

( ) give consent to have my name used

Signature: _____. Date: _____

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL

Andrews University
Office of Research & Creative Scholarship

June 11, 2018

Luis Mancebo
Tel. 716-748-5120
Email: ggregoru@andrews.edu

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
IRB Protocol #:18-014 **Application Type:** Original **Dept.:** Leadership
Review Category: Exempt **Action Taken**: Approved **Advisor:** Gustavo Gregorutti
Title: Case study to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo suburban Seventh-day Adventist church in Lancaster, New York.

Your IRB application for approval of research involving human subjects entitled: "*Case study to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo suburban Seventh-day Adventist church in Lancaster, New York"* IRB protocol # 18-014 has been evaluated and determined Exempt from IRB review under regulation CFR 46.101 (b) (3). You may now proceed with your research.

Please note that any future changes (see IRB Handbook pages 12) made to the study design and/or informed consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented. Incase you need to make changes please use the attached report form.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risks with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, (see IRB Handbook pages 18-19 this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any research-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University Physician, Dr. Katherine, by calling (269) 473-2222.

We ask that you reference the protocol number in any future correspondence regarding this study for easy retrieval of information.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely,

Mordekai Ongo
Research Integrity and Compliance Officer

Institutional Review Board - 4150 Administration Dr Room 322 - Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355
Tel: (269) 471-6361 Fax: (269) 471-6543 E-mail: irb@andrews.edu

APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL CONSENT LETTERS

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
NEW YORK CONFERENCE

4930 West Seneca Turnpike
Syracuse, New York 13215-4203
Telephone (315) 469-6921
Fax (315) 469-6924
www.nyconf.org

Date: 2/19/2018

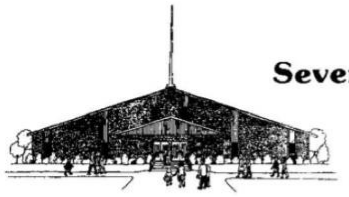
To whom it may concern:

I, Miguel Crespo, President of the New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists grant permission for Pastor Luis Mancebo to use the Buffalo Suburban SDA Church, located in Lancaster, New York, as a case study for his dissertation, *"Case study to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lancaster, New York."*

I approve of his request to research, document, interview, gather statistics and any other efforts needed in order to complete his dissertation.

In His Service,

Miguel Crespo
President, New York Conference



Buffalo Suburban
Seventh-day Adventist Church
5580 Genesee Street
Lancaster, New York 14086

Church Telephone: (716) 685-1581
684-2943

January 26, 2017

Institutional Review Board
Andrews University
8975 US-31
Berrien Springs, MI 49104

Regarding the proposed dissertation research of Pastor Luis Mancebo:

The Buffalo Suburban SDA Church Board, in a regularly scheduled Board meeting January 12, 2017, unanimously approved a proposal to allow the collection of data regarding our congregation in support of Pastor Luis Mancebo's dissertation research, "Case study to explore the influence of racial diversity on church growth in the Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist church in Lancaster, New York."

If you have any questions, please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Robin W. Erwin, Jr.

Robin W. Erwin, Jr., Ph.D.
First Elder and Chair,
Buffalo Suburban SDA Church Board

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